

# STUDIEN ZUM NEUEN TESTAMENT UND SEINER UMWELT (SNTU)

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## Universal Reconciliation (Col 1,20)<sup>1</sup>

It is commonly held that Col 1,15–20 is a hymn which the author – who in the opinion of many is not Paul<sup>2</sup> – has used for his letter. A review of the suggestions concerning the original form of the "hymn"<sup>3</sup> reveals an impressive amount of scholarly ingenuity, but there seems to be depressingly little which is certain about these suggestions, as, of course, the exegetical results become less certain the more they are based on literary reconstructions which are necessarily hypothetical.<sup>4</sup> Such

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<sup>1</sup> This is a thoroughly revised version of a paper delivered in October 1981 at the Swedish Theological Institute in Jerusalem. It is dedicated to Professor Harald Riesenfeld, Uppsala, at the occasion of his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, February 8, 1983, as a token of gratitude to him as a teacher, who, being himself an expert in the Biblical languages and in the history of religions, has always been eager to convey to his students a due respect for such facts.

<sup>2</sup> In the following I am going to assume that the writer of Col is not Paul personally, but somebody close to him. *E. Schweizer's* suggestion that Timothy has wielded the pen seems rather attractive (*Der Brief an die Kolosser* [EKK], Zürich-Einsiedeln-Köln <sup>2</sup>1981, 26).

<sup>3</sup> There is a need for further research as to the criteria for isolating hymns, formulas etc. in older texts, including the vast Jewish pseudepigraphic literature. *E. Stauffer* pointed to some criteria in his *New Testament Theology*, London 1955, 338f. See further *H. Conzelmann - A. Lindemann, Arbeitsbuch zum Neuen Testament* (UTB, 52), Tübingen <sup>6</sup>1982, § 12 (+ lit.). Cf. *K. Berger, Exegese des Neuen Testaments* (UTB, 658), Heidelberg <sup>2</sup>1984, 115.

<sup>4</sup> *J.-N. Aletti, Colossiens 1,15–20* (AnBib, 91), Rome 1981, 21ff gives a good survey of the vast amount of suggestions. In *J. Gnilka's* commentary (*Der Kolosserbrief* [HThK, 10/1], Freiburg-Basel-Wien 1980, 53ff) one finds a presentation of the more significant attempts at a reconstruction. See also *P. Benoit, L'hymne christologique de Col 1,15–20. Jugement critique sur l'état des recherches*, in: *J. Neusner* (ed), *Christianity, Judaism and Other Graeco-Roman Cults, I* (= Fs. M. Smith) (SJLA, 12), Leiden 1975, 226–263, esp. 245ff. – *J. C. O'Neill, The Source of the Christology in Colossians*, in: *NTS* 26 (1980) 87–100 suggests that the author actually quoted different fragments of Jewish traditions; this means a concentration on the author-side of the textual communication, which has the same advantages and drawbacks as the "hymn"-hypotheses. *H. Riesenfeld* has often expressed his doubts concerning the latter hypotheses, so already in *Allt är skapat i Kristus*, in: Fs. R. Prenter, ed. by *G. Wingren-A. M. Aagaard*, Copenhagen 1967, 54–64, esp. 54f.

As to v. 20, the words "and through him to reconcile all things unto him" are regarded by some as an addition; the whole phrase "making peace through the blood of his cross" is deleted by some, whereas others content themselves with leaving out "through the blood of his cross"; finally, "whether on earth or in heaven" is deemed an embellishment by some (see *Gnilka*, *Kol*, 53ff).

a statement is not to deny the legitimacy of this kind of traditio-historical and redactio-critical research. The latter can suggest valuable insights into early Christian ideas and issues behind the ones we encounter more overtly in the NT texts themselves.

On the following pages, however, I will try to shed some light on the text of Col 1,20 as it stands,<sup>5</sup> assuming that its author believed his shaping of the text to be reasonable and that (at least some of) his readers would understand his intent.<sup>6</sup> For this purpose I will adduce some material from contemporary Judaism, not least Philo, which, I think, represents ways of thinking that may have played a role in the author's conception and for the readers' understanding of the passage.

Col 1,20 presents us with several problems, some of which are the following: How is one to deal with εἰς αὐτόν, the adverbial phrase connected to ἀποκαταλλάξαι? As normally (ἀπο)καταλλάξαι is followed by a dative or by πρὸς, the εἰς is a bit peculiar. In addition, one must ask to whom does this αὐτόν refer. Is it God, the actor behind the following εἰρηνοποιήσας, or is it the Son, "in" whom everything is held together according to v. 17? Closely related to the problem of εἰς αὐτόν is the question of the partners of the reconciliation: Are they to be understood as "all things" among themselves, earthly things to heavenly ones, all things to God, or all things to the Son, or is it that the actual partners are not mentioned in the text?<sup>7</sup>

This, in turn, leads to the question, what is the relevant background to the idea of the universal reconciliation? Here I only mention some suggestions which have been given: E. Lohmeyer referred to the Jewish Day of Atonement,<sup>8</sup> E. Käsemann

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<sup>5</sup> I prefer the more difficult reading which includes a second δι' αὐτοῦ. — Although 1,15–20 stands out as a literary unit, stylistically seen, I take the stand that, although the author of Col may have taken over this "hymn" in changing it, adding or leaving out things, it is sound method to approach the whole text of Col as a consistent literary work. Such a stand means assuming that the readers were able to get the writer's message without needing any insights into his doings when writing. So I do not adduce reworkings of an original as explanation of the contents; such a stand is also relevant for an assessment of the suggestion of P. Benoit that the ἀποκαταλλάσσειν of 1,20 is brought into the text as an afterthought under the influence of its appearance in 1,22 (Benoit, L'hymne, 256ff).

<sup>6</sup> Thus also T. E. Pollard, Colossians 1,12–20. A Reconsideration, in: NTS 27 (1981) 572–575, who concentrates on the existing text, that being "the exegete's primary concern" (573).

<sup>7</sup> Cf., e.g., Aletti, Colossiens, 21ff, who favors the last possibility.

<sup>8</sup> E. Lohmeyer, Die Briefe an die Philipper, an die Kolosser und an Philemon (KEK, 9), Göttingen 1974, ad loc.

pointed to Virgil's 4<sup>th</sup> eclogue as representative of Hellenistic-Roman expectations that cosmic peace belonged to the conditions to be established in the golden age.<sup>9</sup> S. Lyonnet quoted Philo's *SpecLeg* (II, 190ff) as a witness of a Jewish Rosh ha-Shanah tradition taken up in Col, which stressed God's role as the peace-maker of the universe.<sup>10</sup> E. Schweizer, using Lyonnet's suggestion, pointed to a widely spread conviction in Antiquity that the world was continuously threatened by a struggle among its elements; one response to this threat can be seen in the way Philo presented God as the real peace-maker, and in a similar but christianized way, as expressed by the author of the original hymn in Col 1.<sup>11</sup>

Before entering into this discussion of the contents of Col 1,20 and its background, we should deal with the more linguistic issues. Thus, we first have to ask the question: To — or unto — whom are all things reconciled? Several versions suggest that the referent is God, rendering the text "reconcile all things to (unto) himself".<sup>12</sup> Presumably the translators have been inspired by 2 Cor 5,19 ("God in Christ was reconciling the world to himself"). But there the Greek says precisely "himself" (ἑαυτῷ). My contention is that one should take seriously the fact that, from v. 15 on, the prepositions ἐν, διὰ, and εἰς appear in a solemn series, all of them connected with a "him". That is, the "to him" of v. 20 links up with the preceding "in him" ("all fullness was pleased to dwell") and with "through him" ("reconcile all things"). This indicates that the linguistic sequence suggested to a reader or listener that the εἰς αὐτόν of v. 20 referred to the Son.

Next, we take up the awkward εἰς. In vv. 15–20 the three prepositions ἐν, διὰ and εἰς appear in two parallel sequences. It is likely that this parallelism has caused ἀποκαταλλάσσειν to be followed by an εἰς. As I have already mentioned, the one to whom one is reconciled is normally put in dative or after a πρός. So some want a translation which is as awkward as the Greek, e.g., "unto him", "auf ihn hin", "pour lui". But perhaps the εἰς is not so terribly awkward. εἰς and πρός were used similarly in the Greek of those days, and often in what seems to be totally in-

<sup>9</sup> E. Käsemann, *Eine urchristliche Taufiturgie*, in: *id.*, *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen*, I, Göttingen 1970, 34–51, 37 (first publ. in 1949).

<sup>10</sup> S. Lyonnet, *L'hymne christologique de l'Épître aux Colossiens et la fête juive du Nouvel An*, in: *RSR* 48 (1960) 93–100.

<sup>11</sup> E. Schweizer, *Das hellenistische Weltbild als Produkt der Weltangst*, in: *id.*, *Neotestamentica*, Zürich-Stuttgart 1963, 15–27; *id.*, *Versöhnung des Alls. Kol 1,20*, in: G. Strecker (ed), *Jesus Christus in Historie und Theologie* (= Fs. H. Conzelmann), Tübingen 1975, 487–501; *id.*, *Kol*, ad loc. and 100ff.

<sup>12</sup> E.g., AV, RSV, and the Swedish translation of 1981.

discriminate ways.<sup>13</sup> Thus, given the context, I think that there are sufficient linguistic arguments for translating "reconcile all things to him". Nonetheless one should be prepared to hear a slight accent of direction in the expression, of a movement towards an aim, as in v. 16c: "All things are created . . . unto him".

Thus I end up with a translation like this one: "(He who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, for in him all fullness was pleased to dwell) and through him to reconcile all things to him, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross".

Before assessing the history of religions background of our text, we must briefly consider that to which the "all things" reconciled may refer. The expression (τὰ πάντα) occurs four times in vv. 15–20: "All things were created through him and to him" (v. 16 *bis*), "all things are held together in him" (v. 17). In v. 16 the concept is specified: "All things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, thrones, dominations, sovereignties, powers" (θρόνοι, κυριότητες, ἀρχαί, ἐξουσίαι). The same perspective returns at the end of v. 20: "whether on earth or in heaven". We need not now enter upon a discussion of the Colossian heresy, nor of the terminology used for these thrones, sovereignties etc.<sup>14</sup> Let us only note that the author shares a view widely held in Antiquity, viz., that man belonged to a cosmos that was alive, filled and swayed by all sorts of living powers. Elements like fire and water, the seasons, the sun, moon and stars, gods, demons, angels, etc. all were powers that had to be more or less controlled or subdued, be it through a mighty god (Zeus or Isis or Yahweh) or by magic. Jews and Christians of course shared this outlook. Philo argues, e.g., that the stars are divine beings which function as the supreme god's lieutenants (SpecLeg, I, 13ff), and Paul, like Philo, believes "there is no god but the One, even if there are so-called gods, either in the sky or on the earth, as there are many gods and many lords" (1 Cor 8,4f).<sup>15</sup>

Behind the designations of the thrones, sovereignties etc. of Col 1 we should expect as little of systematic thinking and consistent terminology as one finds in

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<sup>13</sup> F. Blasß-A. Debrunner-F. Rehkopf, Grammatik des Neutestamentlichen Griechisch, Göttingen <sup>16</sup>1984, § 402,2.4; 196,2; C. F. D. Moule, An Idiom-Book of New Testament Greek, Cambridge 1971 (= <sup>2</sup>1959), 54.67f.

<sup>14</sup> An illuminating investigation that points to the remaining difficulties is P. Benoit, Angéologie et démonologie pauliniennes. Réflexions sur la nomenclature des Puissances célestes et sur l'origine du mal angélique chez S. Paul, in: Foi et Culture à la lumière de la Bible, Torino 1981, 217–233.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. also Rom 8,38f and, less confident, Jude 8f. See for the general outlook R. Patai, Man and Temple, London 1947, chap. 1.

other texts which reflect this kind of mythological thinking.<sup>16</sup> It is enough for our purpose to state that the author sees his addressees as belonging to a cosmos in which there are spiritual elements that demand their respect: They should not touch this, not taste that, etc. (2,16ff). He argues that the respect demanded should not be payed, because these thrones, principalities etc. have all been subdued under Christ, indeed they owe their existence to him.

We now proceed to consider some further factors in the contemporary religious background of Col 1,20. E. Lohmeyer and E. Schweizer, each in his own way, have drawn attention to the cultic connotations of the phraseology of v. 20: To talk of reconciliation and peacemaking through blood could hardly cause but cultic associations.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, it is a general phenomenon in religion that man's worship concerns his whole world, heaven and earth.<sup>18</sup> The gods or the powers whom he worships reign over the universe he lives in, however small or large it may be. This has, of course, to do with the fact that he is dependent on the universe involved. In an agricultural environment, for example, his life hangs on the crops, which in their turn, depend on the powers who command the seasons and the climate, be they benevolent or angry.

Not only do the rites of the worship envisage man's whole world, but the cult sites themselves also lead his thoughts to the universe; they or their equipment represent the cosmos in one or another way. Let me mention a couple of examples, chosen at random: Plutarch reports that "Numa is said to have built the temple of Vesta in circular form . . . copying not the figure of the earth as being Vesta but of the whole universe" (Numa, 11). According to Josephus, the three parts of the Jerusalem Temple corresponded to the three parts of the world, sea, land, and heaven (Ant, III, 7,7).<sup>19</sup>

The last example indicates that the Jews were no exception when it came to putting their worship in a universal perspective. So Philo, like several of his fellow-

<sup>16</sup> Benoit, *Angélogogie*; *Gnilka*, Kol, 65; *Aletti*, Colossiens, 61.

<sup>17</sup> Although *Schweizer*, *Versöhnung*, 492f mentions the cultic perspective, its importance is diminished by his concentration on a reconstructed hymn without the words "through the blood of his cross".

<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., *G. van der Leeuw*, *Phänomenologie der Religion*, Tübingen <sup>3</sup>1970, 439ff; *S. Mowinckel*, *Kultus*, in: *RGG* <sup>3</sup>IV, 120–126, 124.

<sup>19</sup> See further *Patai*, *Man*, chaps. 3 and 4; *G. Widengren*, *Aspetti simbolici dei templi e luoghi di culto del Vicino Oriente antico*, in: *Numen* 7 (1960) 1–25; *P. Schäfer*, *Tempel und Schöpfung*, in: *Kairos* 16 (1974) 122–133.



Jews,<sup>20</sup> understood the details that composed the high priest's vestment as symbolizing the universe and its elements:

"The high priest of the Jews makes prayers and gives thanks not only on behalf of the whole human race but also for the parts of nature, earth, water, air, fire. For he holds the world to be, as in very truth it is, his country, and in its behalf he is wont to propitiate the Ruler (ἐξευμενίζεσθαι τὸν ἡγεμόνα) with supplication and intercession, beseeching him to make his creature a partaker of his kindly and merciful nature" (SpecLeg, I,97).<sup>21</sup>

A passage from the Life of Moses presents the cosmic powers as more actively involved in the rites of worship, and yet man's sins are also taken into account. After an interpretation of the priestly garment similar to the one of SpecLeg, I,97, Philo describes the high priest's entering to offer "the ancestral prayers and sacrifices" and goes on to state that "the whole universe" enters with him "to plead his cause, that sins be remembered no more and good gifts showered in rich abundance" (πρός τε ἀμνηστίαν ἀμαρτημάτων καὶ χορηγίαν ἀφθονωτάτων ἀγαθῶν) (VitMos, II,133f).

The author of Col 1,20, as well, seems to stand within a similarly wide-embracing sphere of cultic ideas. Somehow the death of Jesus is comparable to the sacrifices that established a good relationship between God and creation, and then, as in Philo, both man's sins and the lawful behavior of the whole universe are taken into account. He does not, however, work out these associations like, e.g., the author of Hebrews, and he is also less explicit than, for instance, the fourth evangelist who makes Jesus die as a paschal lamb. Although other NT texts speak of Jesus as dying on behalf of (ὑπέρ) others, it is difficult to trace that kind of thinking in our passage.<sup>22</sup> Two details may run counter to such associations, viz., on the one hand, the stress on the divine activity (which is more marked than, e.g., the divine δεῖ behind the ὑπέρ of Jesus' death in Mark). Furthermore the "reconcile to him", i.e., to the Son, blurs a picture of a sacrifice offered to propitiate the wrath of God.

We are brought one step further when we consider that Col 1,15–20 is permeated by so-called Wisdom-Christology.<sup>23</sup> As is well known, the central idea of such a Christology is that God's wisdom or Word (λόγος)<sup>24</sup> or the Divine Reason

<sup>20</sup> E.g., Wisd 19,29; Josephus, Ant, III,7,7.

<sup>21</sup> Here and elsewhere in this paper I largely follow the English trans. of the Loeb edition.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Gnilka*, Kol, ad loc., who thinks that such ideas are not represented in the original hymn, though very well in its revised Colossian form.

<sup>23</sup> See lately *Aletti*, Colossiens, 141ff (+lit.).

<sup>24</sup> For my purpose I do not find it necessary to differentiate between the two concepts. See *B. L. Mack*, Logos und Sophia (StUNT,10), Göttingen 1973, 96ff.133ff et passim.

was in Jesus, so that in his work and words God communicated himself to man; so he did also in the death of Jesus. Another aspect of this Wisdom-Christology concerns creation, and so our author writes that "all things are created through him and all things hold together in him". Philo and others in the Jewish Wisdom-tradition said exactly the same thing about the divine Logos or Wisdom.<sup>25</sup>

What has been said in the preceding paragraph is commonplace in the commentaries to our passage. But it may be worthwhile to note that Philo also presented the Logos as a mediator in cultic terms. Thus, very often he gives an allegoric interpretation of the high priest as symbolizing the Logos. This is the case, e.g., in *Quis rer*, 205f: The Logos "both pleads with the immortal as suppliant for afflicted mortality and acts as ambassador of the ruler to the subject . . .". To God the Logos pledges "the creature that it should never altogether rebel against the rein and choose disorder rather than order". Over against the creation it warrants its "hopes that the merciful God will never forget his own work. For I am the harbinger of peace (says the Logos) to creation from that God whose will is to bring wars to an end, who is ever the guardian of peace".<sup>26</sup> We note that here also the motif of God as the peacemaker appears in connection with that of the mediating function of the Logos.

Thus, although our Col-text does not specifically mention the Logos, its idea of the Son's role as the mediator of creation seems to reflect a Logos (Wisdom) Christology, and such a Christology is also compatible, with the motif that through him God has reconciled the whole universe, making peace through the blood on his cross.

The motif of God as the peacemaker is worthy of some further considerations. Thus, E. Schweizer has stressed — as already mentioned — that a passage like the one from *Quis rer* reflects a Philonic, indeed Jewish, answer to a worldview according to which the world threatened to break down in the struggle among its elements: through his Logos God warrants the stability and peace of the world.<sup>27</sup> This aspect of the universal perspective certainly is important to Philo, and, as a matter of fact, the passage belongs to an extended discussion of the principle of a universal *ἰσότης*, beginning at *Quis rer*, 141.<sup>28</sup> In Col, however, the accents may be different. This will be further discussed below.

<sup>25</sup> E.g., *Sir* 43,26; Philo, *Cher*, 36, 127; cf. *Wisd* 9,9; 7,12. See *Mack*, *Logos*, 71f.144ff.

<sup>26</sup> See also, e.g., *Plant*, 8–10; *Agr*, 50ff.

<sup>27</sup> *Schweizer*, *Versöhnung*.

<sup>28</sup> Philo is, by the way, eager to demonstrate that the principle in question has its origin with Moses, not with Heraclit (214).

Another Philonic passage has played a role in the discussion concerning God's peacemaking in Col 1,20, viz., SpecLeg, II,188ff. Lyonnet quoted it as a basis for his suggestion that the New Year celebrations could shed light on our Col-verse, and Schweizer has used it as another witness of Philo's manner of dealing with the *Brüchigkeit der Welt*.<sup>29</sup> In this text Philo comments on the *shophar* blasts of the Rosh ha-Shanah and first interprets them as a remembrance of the Sinai revelation. Then he remarks that "the trumpet is the instrument used in war" and finds symbolism in this as well:

"There is another war not of human agency when nature is at strife in herself, when her parts make onslaught one on another and her law-abiding sense of equality (ισότης) is vanquished by the greed for inequality . . . the forces of nature use drought, rainstorms, violent moisture-laden winds, scorching sun-rays, intense cold accompanied by snow, with the regular harmonious alternations of the yearly seasons turned into disharmony, a state of things in my opinion due to the impiety which does not gain a gradual hold but comes rushing with the force of a torrent among those whom these things befall. And therefore the law instituted this feast figured by that instrument of war the trumpet . . . to be as a thank-offering to God the peace-maker (εἰρηνοποιός) and peace-keeper (εἰρηνοφύλαξ), who destroys faction both in cities and in the various parts of the universe and creates plenty and fertility and abundance of other good things and leaves the havoc of fruits without a single spark to be rekindled".

There are good reasons to assume that SpecLeg, II,188ff contains several echoes from the Jewish New Year feast, although it is very difficult to discern more precisely their outlines.<sup>30</sup> The idea of God's role as the supreme warranter of peace is, however, by no means confined to this New Year text and envisages more than the *ισότης* of the universe. In the ending of Decal (178), for example, Philo explains why there are no punishments coupled to the commandments of the decalogue in that he assigns the punishments of sinners to God's assessor (πάρεδρος) Justice (δίκη):

"But it benefits the Great King that the general safety of the universe should be ascribed to him, that he should be the guardian of peace (εἰρηνοφυλακῶν) and supply richly and abundantly the good things of peace, all of them to all persons in every place and at every time. For indeed God is the Prince of Peace (πρῶτανις εἰρήνης) while his subalterns are the leaders in war.

<sup>29</sup> Lyonnet, L'hymne; Schweizer, Versöhnung; *id.*, Kol, ad loc. See also Gnilka, Kol, ad loc.

<sup>30</sup> See Lyonnet, L'hymne; L. Hartman, Asking for a Meaning (CB NT,12), Lund 1979, 103ff (+lit.).

Texts like these seem to presuppose that, somehow, universe and man stand together under moral obligation, and while the universe, in the form of planets, elements etc. always is loyal, man is not. This brings us to a further aspect of Philo's view on cosmos, man and God, viz., that of the right Logos (ὁρθὸς λόγος) as a rule. This may be of some interest to him who, like me, has taken Col 1,20 as saying "reconcile to him" = the Son who has been presented in Logos terms. So in Opif, 3 we read:

"The world is in harmony with the Law and the Law with the world . . . the man who observes the Law is constituted thereby a loyal citizen of the world, regulating his doings by the purpose and will of Nature, in accordance with which the entire world itself also is administered".<sup>31</sup>

The true world-citizen, the moral man, follows the same constitution as the whole world, namely nature's right Logos (Opif, 143). So also the repentant soul is said to be reconciled with the right Logos (Quod det, 149; it finds *καταλλαγῆ*).

I have quoted Philo as a representative of a way of thinking which to a certain extent has the same basic perspective on the universe as has the author of Col 1,15–20. Both see themselves surrounded by a living cosmos, both believe in the One and Only God, the supreme peace-maker, both seem to assume that worship of that God has a universal bearing, both are convinced that God's Word or Wisdom is a supreme mediator between God and the world, in the "beginning" as well as when it comes to the relationship between God and creation in the present. Both seem to believe that God's Word represents a code by which "the all", man included, must live. There are, of course, also differences between Philo and our author, the principal one being that the latter was convinced that God's Logos or Wisdom had been incarnate in Jesus. Another difference is that Philo is a philosopher, although as such he does not forget his religion. He reflects on the threatened *ἰσότης* of the universe, but does not sharply distinguish the question of the relationships of the elements to God and his Logos from that of man's place before God. This holds true when he pictures the high priest's service and the mediation of the Logos, as well as when he discusses the peace: Note, e.g., how, in the passage on the New Year celebration, Philo assumes that the disturbance in the climate is due to man's *ἀνομία*. In so linking man together with "the all" he is not

<sup>31</sup> See also, e.g., Migr, 130; VitMos, II,48. These ideas, of course, have Stoic counterparts; see *J. v. Armin*, *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, I, Leipzig 1903, 262; Diogenes Laertius, VI, 63; VII, 87.

too different from our Christian author.<sup>32</sup> But to the philosopher Philo the peace between the universal powers seems to belong to the world of theories to a larger extent than do the problems caused by the thrones, sovereignties etc. which lie behind Col 1. So a decisive difference seems to be that while Philo envisages a peace which is warranted in eternity by God the creator, the Christian author, on the other hand, thinks that through Jesus' death and resurrection a change has taken place in the universe, and that a peace is established through Jesus that was not previously there.

The reason why one investigates the background of a text is to clarify the contents of the text. Accordingly I will now try to develop a few aspects of Col 1,20 in the light of the suggestions of the preceding pages.<sup>33</sup>

One important aspect of all Logos or Wisdom speculation<sup>34</sup> is the notion of a mediation between a transcendent God and a world that is dependent on him. This mediation is seen from man's point of view, through which, on the one hand, man finds an active and divine reason or purpose behind that which exists and happens. On the other hand, man can become acquainted with this mediating divine reason, he can take part of it so that he is drawn into the divine sphere. The Wisdom, being "a breath of the power of God", "passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God" (Wisd 7,25.27). Thus Logos or Wisdom speculation implies the idea of divine self-communication, of revelation, of salvation through revelation, etc.

Now Col 1,15–20 presupposes that the absolute Being in, under and behind everything, the „Fullness“,<sup>35</sup> communicated itself<sup>36</sup> according to its creative will. So it did and so it does in creation, but also in the person of Jesus, in his life, and, not least, in his death and resurrection — in the wording of v. 20: God made peace "through the blood of his cross". That Jesus died through crucifixion, the *mors turpissima*, was a gruesome fact that must necessarily have been a *scandalon* to man in Antiquity,<sup>37</sup> and it must have influenced the Christian reflection on its meaning.

<sup>32</sup> If I read *Schweizer* right (Versöhnung), he understands Philo differently.

<sup>33</sup> There are certainly others, which, however, I leave aside, not least those pertaining to the exaltation/vindication motifs in early Christologies, often connected with a Son-Christology — see *M. Hengel*, *Der Sohn Gottes*, Tübingen 1977, 93ff.

<sup>34</sup> For the following see *Mack*, *Logos*, 184f.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Philo, *LegAll*, III,4: "God fills and penetrates all things" (πάντα πεπλήρωκεν ὁ θεός). Also, e.g., *Som*, II,221. See *J. Ernst*, *Pleroma und Pleroma Christi* (BUnt, 5), Regensburg 1970, esp. chaps. 2 and 3. Further lit. in *Aletti*, *Colossiens*, 77.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. the role played by the knowledge of God in, e.g., 1,9f; 2,2f; 3,10.

<sup>37</sup> See *M. Hengel*, *Crucifixion*, London 1977.

To regard the person of Jesus in this way requires the conviction that his person and career represented a total dedication to God and his will, for otherwise he could hardly be identified with the divine Logos or Wisdom. There are indications that the historical Jesus meant that God wanted him to live and die for others.<sup>38</sup> Paul also thought that this attitude was typical of Jesus (see, e.g., Rom 15,3; 2 Cor 8,9), and the author of Col seems to be of a similar opinion. The way in which the apostolic mission is presented in Col 1,24 is a sign of that view of his, and so is the catalogue of virtues in 3,12ff.

This being so, we may imagine what, in the eyes of our author, was an essential feature of God's Logos, made manifest in Jesus. One might dare say that the divine Logos or Wisdom, or, using a less technical expression, the active principle in and behind the all, appeared also as a principle of total dedication to God and to fellowmen. This was what real manhood should be, and this was a manifestation of what the Fullness was like. According to our writer that was the reason why Jesus' death was not the end; for a death in such a spirit became a death unto God. Thus his death was also a birth, as the author of Col says: *Because* the fullness dwelt in him and reconciled all things, he is the firstborn from the dead (v. 18).

At this point we should also note that the Logos-Wisdom categories invite us to regard God as the ultimate subject behind the work of the Logos/Wisdom. It was the εὐδοκία of the Fullness to reconcile and make peace through his death. Thus, on the one hand, Jesus was a man who dedicated himself to God and fellowmen, on the other the reconciliation that was so achieved was the work of the Fullness. It seems that the second view includes the first one without eliminating the acts of will that belong to such a commitment of self.<sup>39</sup> The Logos/Wisdom categories thus serve to underline that the principle made manifest in Jesus' person and work is really divine and that it really becomes a means of divine self-communication.

Now the Christ-event also meant that the principle that was made manifest became the rule of the universe in a way it had not been before. Our author is namely of the opinion that the Christ-event brought with it a change in the position of the all, to be compared to the change of the situation of the addressees ("you too . . ."; v. 21). This raises a couple of questions. Does the author mean that, e.g., the actual situation of the planets has been changed through Christ? And how can he see

<sup>38</sup> See lately *M. Hengel, The Atonement*, London 1981, 71ff with references, and, not least, *H. Schürmann, Jesu ureigener Tod*, Freiburg-Basel-Wien <sup>2</sup>1976.

<sup>39</sup> For further discussion, which rather belongs to the field of systematic theology, see, e.g., *J. Macquarrie, Principles of Christian Theology*, London <sup>2</sup>1977, 290ff.311ff.

the realities around himself and believe that all things are reconciled with this Logos, are pacified and brought into harmony with this principle?<sup>40</sup>

Of course, to answer such questions, one must employ some guesswork. Still, as to the first question asked, we should again remind ourselves of the common view that, e.g., the planets were living creatures, belonging to the same world as man. Further, in the writer's mode of thinking (the Logos categories included) the focus is on man, so that even when talking of the all, he talks of the all as related to man. Accordingly, an answer to the question concerning the planets could be: Yes, the Christ event has changed their situation in so far as, if anyone is afraid of them or of their ability to influence his destiny, he should know that the real power and the deepest divine principle of the world is the one he is ruled by, Christ's.<sup>41</sup> The "peace" is not one between two equal parts, but one forcefully brought about by a triumphant victor (cf. Col 2,15).

In suggesting an answer to the second question, concerning how realistic our author is, we may once more consider his focus, which is on man and on man's relationship to God. He seems to talk of cosmos and its different powers and principles only to say that God's active purpose, made incarnate in Christ, is stronger than they, and that, fundamentally, they are to yield to this purpose. In its turn this is said in order that the addressees realize that they should be ruled by Christ, not by any other principle, tendency or power, although such demand to be respected.

Thus, facing the gruesome realities of evil, our author has not solved the problem of the earthquake in Lisbon. We should also note, however, that the Logos/Wisdom aspects in Col 1,20 also imply a nuance of hope. The revelation of God's Logos indicates a pattern of love that already prevails in those circumstances when God's reign holds sway among men and elsewhere in creation. But one also expects that this pattern, somehow, will prevail throughout. This dimension of hope is indicated by the nuance of direction in the εἰς αὐτόν of 1,15–20: "All things are created unto him", and „all things are reconciled to/unto him“. The possible tension between the two renderings is minimized when that with which one is reconciled is also described as a purpose, such as we have done with the Logos. The divine purpose, through which all things came into being (v. 16), still is there as the

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. *Gnilka*, Kol, ad loc.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. how Paul, in his triumphant "not any power or height or depth . . . can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8,38f), may very well refer to astrology (thus *H. Lietzmann*, An die Römer [HbNT, 8], Tübingen 1971, ad loc.).

purpose that is a gravitation point of all things. In the present, man looks forward, waiting for the fulfilment of this purpose. But the pattern of love and divine generosity is also a task: "Put on, as the elect of God and beloved, sincere compassion, kindness, humility . . . and over all these put on love" (3,12ff).

The preceding pages represent an attempt to deal with Col 1,20 not primarily as the upshot of a revision of another text (which it might very well be!), but as a text that in its present shape makes use of and for its understanding presupposes ideas from its cultural environment. It seems to me that the Philonic ways of thinking of the Logos represent such ideas. They are certainly not the only ones behind our text, but I hope I have shown that they or similar opinions probably belong to the background of Col's motif of the reconciliation of the all, viz., a background, the knowledge of which can promote our understanding of the text.