

Paul's Encomion for the Messiah:
Colossians 1:15-20 as ὁ βασιλικὸς λόγος

ABSTRACT

The conceptual and linguistic resources for understanding the Christ-hymn of Colossians 1:15-20 is not 'Wisdom-Christology' or Middle-Platonic speculation upon intermediary figures but is, rather, found in the ancient practice of praise of kings, emperors, and rulers. Hellenistic kings and Roman emperors were often assimilated to particular gods and thereby received honors – including hymnic praise – reserved for deities. Similarly, Jews often praised both past kings and the hoped-for coming messianic king through hymns – most notably in poetic seams in the Pentateuch and in the Psalms. One frequently finds the following reasons for praising the king in most hymns: a) the king is a vicegerent of a god; b) the king upholds and sustains the created universe or *oikoumene*; c) the king is a worthy ruler and benefactor who has bestowed gifts of harmony and peace to his subjects. All three reasons are paralleled in the Christ-hymn of Col. 1:15-20. Paul's praise of the Messiah in the Colossian Christ-hymn is a creative development of Jewish Messianism and Hellenistic-Roman kingship ideology and counters the Colossians' preoccupation with other powers as it allows them to participate in the rule of Christ as the only true king's rule.

According to Pliny's report to Trajan, the early Christians "were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god (*carmenque Christi quasi deo*)" (Letter 10.96; cf. Eusebius *The History of the Church* 3.33.1).¹ Pliny's statement coheres well with early Christian texts that testify that it was common practice within the worship gathering of the Christian assemblies to "sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody in your hearts *to the Lord*" (Eph. 5:19; cf. 1 Cor. 14:26; Acts 16:25; James 5:13). The author of Revelation provides further evidence for the early Christian practice of composing hymns to Christ *as to a god* through its hymns to Christ that ascribe attributes of Christ which elsewhere belong to God alone (compare Rev. 5:8-14 with 4:8-11).² And in Col. 3:16 it appears

¹ On singing to Christ in early Christianity, see Martin Hengel, "The Song about Christ in Earliest Worship," in *Studies in Early Christology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 227-291.

² On this, see Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 197-201; Justin P. Jeffcoat Schedtler, *A Heavenly Chorus: The Dramatic Function of Revelation's Hymns* (unpublished Emory University dissertation 2013); Martin Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul: Studies in the Earliest History of Christianity* (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 78-96, here, 81-86.

that Paul intended for “the word of the Messiah” (ὁ λόγος τοῦ Χριστοῦ) to inhabit the assembly through singing “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.” The implication is obvious as Adela Collins notes: “Paul clearly alludes to the practice of composing religious songs and presenting them in communal worship.”³ That the early Christians engaged in writing hymns and singing to Christ has been confirmed by form-critical work that has discovered hymnic elements in Phil. 2:6-11; Col. 1:15-20; 1 Tim. 3:16; and Rev. 5:9-14.⁴ The NT evidence, thus, fits nicely with Pliny’s statement that the Christians sang hymns to Christ.⁵

What has not been recognized, however, is that the early Christian practice of composing hymns to Christ “as to a god”, that is of taking divine predicates and ascribing them to Christ, conforms nicely with how ancient Greeks, Romans, and Jews treated their own rulers. Kings were often assimilated to, even identified with gods and thereby treated as worthy of divine praises. Most scholars have failed to see the potential of ancient kingship ideology to illumine Col. 1:15-20, and have instead insisted that Hellenistic-Jewish speculation upon personified Wisdom or Middle Platonic speculation upon the *Logos* provides the context for understanding

³ Adela Yarbro Collins, “The Psalms and the Origins of Christology,” in *Psalms in Community: Jewish and Christian Textual, Liturgical, and Artistic Traditions* (eds. Harold W. Attridge and Margot E. Fassler; SBL Symposium Series 25; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 113-123, here, 113.

⁴ The scholarship is voluminous. For a comprehensive treatment of the hymns in the New Testament, see Jack T. Sanders, *The New Testament Christological Hymns: Their Historical Religious Background* (SNTSMS 15; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971); Klaus Wengst, *Christologische Formeln und Lieder des Urchristentums* (SNT 7; Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1972); Ralph P. Martin, *A Hymn of Christ: Philippians 2:5 – 11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997); more recently, see Matthew E. Gordley, *The Colossian Hymn in Context: An Exegesis in Light of Jewish and Greco-Roman Hymnic and Epistolary Conventions* (WUNT 2.228; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2007).

⁵ Cf. William Horbury, *Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ* (London: SCM, 1998), 109-110.

the lofty claims made in Col. 1:15-20.⁶ This is surprising for three reasons: a) the referent of the hymn *within its literary context* is not Wisdom but God's "beloved son" (an honorific that surely resonates with the institution of Israelite kingship, 1:13),⁷ b) numerous elements of the hymn have no linguistic *or* conceptual parallel with descriptions of personified Wisdom or a Logos intermediary, and c) the six occurrences in Colossians where Paul does refer to σοφία (1:9, 28; 2:3, 23; 3:16; 4:5) are non-descript character attributes associated with moral formation and have nothing to do with personified Wisdom.⁸ Further, whereas Middle-Platonic speculation upon intermediary figures can provide a strong (though, I think, unconvincing) reading of Paul's cosmological claims in 1:15-16, it cannot account for some any of the aspects of the hymn spoken of in 1:18c-20.

Rather than offer a full-fledged critique of the prevailing scholarly paradigm, I would like to show, instead, that the conceptual and linguistic resources for understanding the Christ-hymn of Colossians 1:15-20 can be found in the

⁶ For Middle-Platonic influence, see Thomas H. Tobin, "The World of Thought in the Philippians Hymn (2:6-11)," in *The New Testament and Early Christian Literature in Greco-Roman Context: Studies in Honor of David E. Aune* (ed. John Fotopoulos; NovTSup; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 91-104. C. H. Dodd states that every element of the Colossian Christ-hymn "can be traced to Jewish Wisdom theology." See C. H. Dodd, "The History and Doctrine of the Apostolic Age," in *A Companion to the Bible* (ed. T. W. Manson; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1947), 409.

⁷ Even if the hymn is pre-Pauline, which I think is quite likely, Paul's literary placement of the hymn within a context that emphasizes God's royal son (1:13-14) is determinative for how Paul himself understood the hymn. Those who see the hymn as pre-Pauline include: Lohse, Gordley.

⁸ Cf. Dunn, *Christology in the Making*. Wisdom is never spoken of, for example, as "the firstborn of all creation" (1:15), God's agent that "holds together all things" (1:17), the head of an assembly (1:18), "the firstborn from the dead" (1:18b), nor is she an agent of reconciliation that makes peace (1:20). Paul himself indicates that he sees the relationship between Christ and wisdom not as one where Christ is Wisdom personified but rather where wisdom is found in Christ, i.e., as an attribute of the Messiah (Col. 2:2-3). See rightly, however, Gordon D. Fee [*Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 325] who after a thorough and convincing critique of Paul's supposed Wisdom-Christology states regarding Col. 1:15-20: "What Paul's sentences point to instead is a Son of God Christology in which he uses *biblical* images from Genesis and the Davidic kingship." Also, see Sean M. McDonough, *Christ as Creator: Origins of a New Testament Doctrine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 175-176, 180.

widespread ancient practice of praise of kings, emperors, and rulers. Ancient kings were often assimilated to particular gods and thereby received honors, including hymnic praise, reserved for deities. Similarly, at least some Jews praised past kings and the hoped-for coming king through hymns – most notably in poetic seams in the Pentateuch and in the Psalms. Within the hymnic praises to the kings, one often finds the following three reasons for praising the king: a) the king is the vicegerent of a god; b) the king is God's representative who rules over and sustains the created universe and/or empire; c) the king is a benefactor who has bestowed gifts of peace upon his subjects. All three reasons for praise are paralleled in the Colossian Christ-hymn. Thus, Paul's praise of the Messiah can be understood as a creative development of Jewish messianism *and* Hellenistic-Roman kingship ideology. The royal hymn functions to counter the church's preoccupation with other powers as it enables them to participate in the true king's rule. Paul's hymn to Christ the King draws the audience into joining their voices with Paul such that they bestow divine honors upon the king and are thereby socialized into a symbolic world where they share in the reign of the King who is lord over every power and authority.

I. Hymns and Encomia to Rulers and Kings

a. How to Praise Rulers – Orators and the Progymnasmata

Gods and humans alike were frequently the recipients of honors and praises through the composition of what the rhetorical teachers of prose composition call encomia.⁹ Kings, rulers, and other heroes were given honors for their virtues,

⁹ On the use of hymns in cults to the gods, see William D. Furley and Jan Maarten Bremer, *Greek Hymns: Selected Cult Songs from the Archaic to the Hellenistic Period* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, xxxx);

relation to the gods, gifts and inventions, and military victories.¹⁰ Aelius Theon states, “the praise of the gods [is called] a hymn” but “whether one praises the living or the dead or heroes or gods, *the method of speaking is one and the same*.”¹¹ Aphthonius says “encomion is language expressive of inherent excellences” and “differs from hymn ... in that a hymn is a celebration of gods, an encomion of mortals.”¹² The specific content of the panegyric varies depending upon who is praised, but “the greatest heading of the encomion,” according to Aphthonius, are “deeds.”¹³ Likewise, Nicolaus the Sophist states: “Encomion is speaking well of some specified person or thing in a discursive way *on the basis of acknowledged merits*.”¹⁴

In his ΠΕΡΙ ΕΠΙΔΕΙΚΤΙΚΩΝ, a handbook given to all topics pertaining to epideictic orations, Menander devotes a lengthy section to a “kingly speech,” that is, “an encomium of the emperor” (ὁ βασιλικὸς λόγος ἐγκώμιόν ἐστι βασιλέως). The royal speech will amplify “the good things attached to the emperor (ἀγαθῶν βασιλεῖ)” (368.3).¹⁵ Since praise of the gods and the emperor are the best things in life, orators “should honor and hymn (ὑμνεῖν) to the best of our ability” (368.19-21).

Ramsay MacMullen and Eugene N. Lane (editors), *Paganism and Christianity: A Sourcebook* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 50-63.

¹⁰ Despite their late dating ([note](#)), one can assume a certain level of familiarity with their techniques for composing conventional literary forms. On the use of the *progymnasmata* in NT studies, see Ronald F. Hock and Edward N. O’Neil (eds.), *The Chreia in Ancient Rhetoric: The “Progymnasmata”* (vol 1; SBLTT 27/SBLGRS 9; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986).

¹¹ The translation is from George A. Kennedy, *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (SBL Writings from the Greco-Roman World; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), 50; for helpful discussion of the *Progymnasmata* on hymns and encomia, see Edgar Krentz, “Epideiktik and Hymnody: The New Testament and Its World,” *Biblical Research* 40 (1995): 50-97, here, 59-71.

¹² Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, 108.

¹³ Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, 108.

¹⁴ Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, 155.

¹⁵ For text and translation, see D. A. Russell and N. G. Wilson, *Menander Rhetor* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981). Also, see Krentz, “Epideiktik and Hymnody,” 62-71.

Menander testifies to the similarity between hymning to the gods and to kings: “We thus propitiate the emperor with words (βασιλέα λόγοις) as we do the divine power with hymns and praises” (369.5-7). The longest section of the encomium should praise the king’s accomplishments, divided into his acts during times of peace and war (372.1-374.33). The orator should conclude by thanking the gods since the emperor upholds creation by insuring “rains in season, abundance from the sea, [and] unstinting harvests” (377.21-24). In return for the king’s gifts “cities, nations, races, and tribes, all of us, garland him, sing of him, write of him. Full of his images are the cities (πλήρεις εικόνων αἱ πόλεις)....” (377.24-28).

Quintilian also suggests that hymns can be composed for gods *and* for men:

With gods...the first thing will be to show veneration of the majesty of their nature; next, to expound the power of each and discoveries of his which have benefitted humanity. ‘Power’ will be displayed: for example, in Jupiter the power of universal rule; in Mars, the power of war; and in Neptune, control of the sea. Inventions will be shown too: the arts for Minerva, letters for Mercury, medicine for Apollo, crops for Ceres, wine for Bacchus. Next we must mention any exploits of theirs known to history. Even gods derive honor from parents – a son of Jupiter for example – and from age for example, those descended from Chaos, and also from their offspring, Apollo and Diana do credit to Latona. Some should be praised because they were born immortal, others because they earned immortality by virtue...” (3.7.7-9).¹⁶

The order of his topics, which applies to both gods *and great men*, proceeds as follows: their majestic nature, benefits and gifts, rule over nature and humanity, great deeds, honorable ancestors and descendants, and their immortal nature.¹⁷

¹⁶ For text and translation see, Quintilian, *The Orator’s Education: Books 3 – 5* (transl. D. A. Russell; Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

¹⁷ Krentz, “Epideiktik and Hymnody,” 57.

From this discussion of the rhetorical techniques used to compose praises to great men we can conclude that there was a considerable degree of overlap between composing hymns to gods and encomia to heroic humans, and though the content of praise varies based on the individual, there is an emphasis upon the powerful deeds of the hero, particularly upon those benefactions that benefit humanity.¹⁸

b. Divine Honors in Response to Kingly Benefactions

To understand *why* kings are hymned to as if they were gods, it is necessary to examine the reasons for which kings begin to be identified with gods under the auspices of the ruler-cult in the Hellenistic and Roman age.¹⁹ Hellenistic kings and later Roman emperors are seen as the vicegerent of the gods who have bestowed their power upon the earthly king to act in their place.²⁰ The bestowal of divine honors upon kings and emperors functioned as an appropriately grateful return for

¹⁸ These rhetorical techniques can be compared with the one of the earliest known encomiastic orations for a ruler - Isocrates' *Evagoras*. Isocrates praises the Cyprian ruler since he is "one of the sons of Zeus" (12-14) and so Zeus upholds Evagoras' kingship (25). The bulk of the oration is devoted to the king's actions (33-39, 47-64), particularly his benefactions (54-57, 65). Evagoras is, therefore, worthy of being declared "a god among men, or a mortal divinity" (ὥς ἢν θεὸς ἐν ἀνθρώποις ἢ δαίμων θνητός, 72). For text and translation, see LaRue Van Hook, *Isocrates: In Three Volumes* (Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968). For a discussion of Isocrates' Cyprian Orations, see Julien Smith, *Christ the Ideal King: Cultural Context, Rhetorical Strategy, and the Power of Divine Monarchy in Ephesians* (WUNT 2.313; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2011), 30-33; also see Matthew E. Gordley, *Teaching through Song in Antiquity: Didactic Hymnody among Greeks, Romans, Jews, and Christians* (WUNT 2.302; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2011), 111-115. On the prevalence of praising rulers through hymns and encomia in the 4th century, see Laurent Pernot, *La rhétorique de l'éloge dans le monde gréco-romain* (2 vols., Paris: Institut d'études augustiniennes, 1993), 1.23.

¹⁹ The receiving of honors by kings that was originally reserved for the gods becomes prevalent after Alexander the Great. Arrian recounts the words of Callisthenes who notes the *earlier* distinction between honors reserved for gods and honors for humans: "Humans greet one another with a kiss, but divinity, I suppose because it is seated on high and must not be touched, is honored with obeisance, and choruses are established for the gods, and paeans are sung to them" (4.11).

²⁰ F. W. Walbank, "Monarchies and Monarchic Ideas," in *The Cambridge Ancient History* (vol. 7.1; ed. F. W. Walbank, A. E. Astin, M. W. Frederiksen, and R.M. Ogilvie; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 62-100, here, 84-96; Horbury, *Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ*, 70. See, for example, Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.286-291; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 858-870.

powerful benefactions.²¹ The relationship between powerful benefactions and divine honors is exemplified in the first lines of Augustus' *Res Gestae*:²²

Translated and inscribed below *are the achievements and gifts of the god Augustus* (πράξεις τε καὶ δωρεαὶ Σεβαστοῦ θεοῦ) ... When I was nineteen years old, I got ready on my own initiative and at my own expense the army by means of which I set the state free from the slavery (δουλήας [ἡλευ]θέ[ρωσα) imposed by the conspirators. *On account of these things the senate passed decrees in praise of me* (ἐπαινέσασά με).²³

In his *Embassy to Gaius* Philo notes that Augustus was awarded divine honors due to his benefaction to Rome of ending the civil wars (149-151). Philo eulogizes Augustus through an encomium for his benefactions whereby Augustus became “the source of veneration” (ἀρχὴ σεβασμοῦ, 143) and ruler of the cosmos (144-148).²⁴

Through his excellent rule of the world, he is “the first and the greatest (πρῶτος καὶ

²¹ It has been the signal contribution of Simon Price to demonstrate that the emperor cult was based upon and intertwined together with the cults of the gods. S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 29-30, 32; Horbury, *Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ*, 69. On the imperial cults arising out of the cults that gave honors to Hellenistic rulers, see Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (trans. Alan Shapiro; Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 297-302. That one of, if not *the*, primary responsibilities of the Roman emperor was hearing requests and petitions and then bestowing gifts and benefits has been demonstrated in detail by Fergus Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World (31 BC – AD 337)* (London: Duckworth, 1977).

²² Ittai Gradel [*Emperor Worship and Roman Religion* (Oxford Classical Monographs; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 26] refers to this as “the honours-for-benefactions structure found in all relationships between parties of vastly unequal power and social standing in Roman society, such as in the interplay between subjects and ruler, cities and benefactors, dependants and patrons, slaves and masters.” Price, *Rituals and Power*, 23: “Ruler cults established by the Hellenistic cities are just honours granted in gratitude for political benefactions.” This explains the why emperors (generally) avoided getting involved in establishing their own cults and why it was, rather, initiated voluntarily by the emperor’s subjects. See further Duncan Fishwick, “Dio and Maecenas: The Emperor and the Ruler Cult,” *Phoenix* 44 (1990): 267-275.

²³ See Alison E. Cooley, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). See further, Zvi Yavetz, “The *Res Gestae* and Augustus’ Public Image,” in *Caesar Augustus: Seven Aspects* (eds. Fergus Millar and Erich Segal; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 1-36.

²⁴ Augustus is described as the one who when “the whole humans race was on the verge of destruction” (144) “calmed the torrential storms” (145)

μέγιστος), the common benefactor of all” (149). There is, then, an explicit relationship between Augustus’ benefactions and his divine praiseworthy status.²⁵ Divinity is less a matter of essence and more a matter of a conferred status that elicits honors as the result of frequent, powerful gifts.²⁶ In other words, to paraphrase an ancient maxim – if gods are those who exercise power, then a king is god-like.²⁷ If kings do what their subjects expect the gods to do, they are thereby worthy of divine honors.²⁸ In the words of Dio Cassius to Octavian:

It is excellence that raises many men to the level of gods (ἰσοθέους)... if you are good as a man and honorable as a ruler (ἔστε σοὶ μὲν ἀγαθῶ τε ὄντι καὶ καλῶς ἄρχοντι), the whole earth will be your sacred precinct, all cities your temples, and all men your statues, since within their thoughts you will ever be enshrined and glorified (52.35.5).²⁹

Augustus’ rule is the result of “good works” (διὰ τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἔργων) and “benefactions” (ἐξ εὐεργεσιῶν, 52.35.3). Nicolaus of Damascus states: “Because humanity addresses him as [Sebastos], *in accordance with their estimation of his*

²⁵ I am not claiming that there is no distinction between the earlier Hellenistic ruler cults and the Roman emperor cults as there was certainly an incredible heightening of the honors bestowed upon Augustus who was now seen as the benefactor to the entire world. However, what is significant for my purposes is that both ruler cult and Roman emperor cult share the similar honor-for-benefaction system as well as the assimilation and identification of rulers with gods. See Price, “Rituals and Power,” 52-55. Cf. Karl Galinsky, *Augustan Culture: An Interpretive Introduction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 322-331.

²⁶ See Michael Peppard, *The Son of God in the Roman World: Divine Sonship in Its Social and Political Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 35: “When continuous benefactions led to continuous honors, that process could admittedly lead to a kind of ontology – a status solidified because of a god’s perpetual benefactions. But this was a process nonetheless: divinity was dynamic.”

²⁷ See the Greek maxim: “What is a god? The exercise of power. What is a king? God-like.” Quoted in Price, “Gods and Emperors,” 95. Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion*, 72, states: “What mattered was power, again *relative* divinity, and Caesar’s power was at this stage unquestioned, as was Jupiter’s. Absolute power entailed divinity and vice versa.”

²⁸ So Walbank, “Monarchies and Monarchic Ideas,” 93-94.

²⁹ For text and translation, see Earnest Cary, *Dio’s Roman History: In Nine Volumes* (Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

honor, they revere him with temple and sacrifices...matching the greatness of his virtue and repaying his benefactions towards them."³⁰

c. Hymns to Rulers in the Hellenistic and Roman Age

In addition to the temples, festivals, sacrifices, libations, honorary inscriptions, and prayers devoted to the king/emperor,³¹ one of the consistent ways that kings received divine honors was through praises and hymns reserved for the gods.³² Throughout the following survey of hymns to rulers, the reader should pay attention to the relationship between divine honors for powerful benefactions, the assimilation of rulers to deities, and the divine election of rulers.

Plutarch states that the Spartan general Lysander was "more powerful than any Greek before him" and for this reason "the first Greek...to whom the cities erected altars and made sacrifices *as to a god* (ὥς θεῶ), the first also to whom songs of triumph were sung" (*Lys.* 18.2-3). Within his retinue at all times was Choerilus to "adorn his achievements with verse (ὥς κοσμήσαντα τὰς πράξεις διὰ ποιητικῆς)," and Antiochus who "composed some verses in his honor" (*Lys.* 18.4).³³

The Athenians are said to have greeted Demetrius Poliorcetes by singing paeans to him, and when he enters their city they are reported to have "sang and

³⁰ *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum* 90 F 125; also see, S. R. F. Price, "Rituals and Power," in *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (ed. Richard A. Horsley; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 47.

³¹ On the celebration of festivals for the emperor, see Price, *Rituals and Power*, ch. 3.

³² Simon R. F. Price ["Gods and Emperors: The Greek Language of the Roman Imperial Cult," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 104 (1984): 79-95, here, 90] states: "Praising both kings and emperors was calqued on the cult of the gods." See also, Horbury, *Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ*, 68-77; David E. Aune, "The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial on the Apocalypse of John," *Papers of the Chicago Society for Biblical Research* 28 (1983): 5-26, here, 16.

³³ On Plutarch's depiction of Lysander as the first Greek to receive divine honors, see Lily Ross Taylor, *The Divinity of the Roman Emperor* (American Philological Association Monograph Series 1; Middletown, CT: 1931), 11.

danced, repeating the refrain that he was the only true god, while all the others were asleep, or making a journey, or non-existent; he, however, was sprung from Poseidon and Aphrodite, pre-eminent in beauty and embracing all in his benevolence" (Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 6.253c).³⁴

One finds two hymns penned for Ptolemy II Philadelphus, one by Callimachus and another by Theocritus.³⁵ Callimachus' praise of Ptolemy is situated within his *Hymn to Zeus* and is in fact centered upon the great god.³⁶ The poet praises Zeus for his wise election of king Ptolemy: "you did choose that which is most excellent among men" ... "you did choose the rulers of cities themselves" (69-70, 72).³⁷ The close relationship between Zeus and king is indicated in the statement: "But from

³⁴ A few lines later the Athenians again flatter the king: "For other gods are either far away or have not ears, or are not, or heed us not at all; but you we can see in very presence, not in wood and not in stone, but in truth. And so we pray to you. First, bring peace!" (Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 6.253d-e). For text and translation, see Charles Burton Gulick, *Athenaeus: The Deipnosophists* (7 vols. Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957).

³⁵ The praise reflected in these hymns is representative of the worship that stems from a dynastic cult. Though these cults had more of a top-down structure, divinity and benefaction were essential components of Ptolemaic and Seleucid kingship as is evident in the fact that many of the kings adopted the honorific "Benefactor" (e.g., Ptolemy III, Antigonos III Doson, Mithridates V, Ptolemy VIII). See Klaus Bringmann, "The King as Benefactor: Some Remarks on Ideal Kingship in the Age of Hellenism," in *Images and Ideologies: Self-definition in the Hellenistic World* (eds. Anthony Bulloch et al., Hellenistic Culture and Society 12; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 7-24; Duncan Fishwick, *The Imperial Cult in the Latin West: Studies in the Ruler Cult of the Western Provinces of the Roman Empire* (2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1987), 1.1-20.

³⁶ Callimachus was a client of Ptolemy II who composed numerous hymns, epigrams, and court poetry. Further, see Peter Green, *Alexander to Actium: The Historical Evolution of the Hellenistic Age* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 179-186. On Callimachus' kingship ideology, see Ludwig Koenen, "The Ptolemaic King as a Religious Figure," in *Images and Ideologies: Self-definition in the Hellenistic World* (eds. Anthony Bulloch et al., Hellenistic Culture and Society 12; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 81-113.

³⁷ For text and translation, see G. R. Mair, *Callimachus, Hymns and Epigrams. Lycophoron. Aratus* (Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969). Both Hellenistic and Roman kingship ideology repeatedly speak of the king as elected by the gods to rule on the god's behalf. This is interconnected with the king's identification and/or assimilation to a particular god, usually Zeus. On this, see the excellent and comprehensive study of J. Rufus Fears, *PRINCEPS A DIIS ELECTUS: The Divine Election of the Emperor as Political Concept at Rome* (Rome: American Academy at Rome, 1977). See also Christian Habicht, *Gottmenschen und griechische Städte* (Zetemata 14; München: Beck, 1956).

Zeus come kings; for nothing is diviner than the kings of Zeus” (ἐκ δὲ Διὸς βασιλῆες, ἐπεὶ Διὸς οὐδὲν ἀνάκτων θειότερον, 78-79).³⁸ Thus, the praise of Zeus legitimates Ptolemy’s kingship given that he rules as Zeus’ representative.³⁹ Those who rule well receive prosperity, and “one may well judge by our Ruler, for he has entirely outstripped all others” as demonstrated by his great accomplishments” (84-89).

Theocritus’ panegyric for Ptolemy (17th Idyll) also speaks of the relationship between the king and Zeus.⁴⁰

With Zeus let us begin, Muses, and with Zeus I pray you end when the
greatest of Immortals is exalted in our song: but for me first
(πρώτοισι), midst and last by the name of Ptolemy; for he is of men the
chiefest (1-4).⁴¹

The god legitimates the reign of Ptolemy as the two are brought in the closest relationship whereby Ptolemy *rules humans as Zeus rules the immortals*. Theocritus says “he will hymn to Ptolemy, seeing that hymns are a reward for even the gods above” (7-8). In singing of Ptolemy’s birth, he sings of Zeus’ sending a mighty eagle, for Zeus “cares for kings that he has loved from his earliest hour” and such a king is the recipient of “great good fortune and wins for himself the mastery of both land and sea” (73-76). Not surprisingly, the king uses this fortune to bestow benefactions

³⁸ Cf. Callimachus’ *Hymn to Apollo*: “He who fights with the Blessed Ones would fight with my King; he who fights with my King, would fight even with Apollo” (26-27).

³⁹ Similarly, see Fears, *PRINCEPS A DIIS ELECTUS*, 75-76; Gordley, *Teaching through Song in Antiquity*, 116.

⁴⁰ Theocritus was most well known for his pioneer as a pastoral poet, similar to the later Vergil’s *Eclogues*, and was a contemporary of Callimachus. For historical context of Theocritus, see Green, *Alexander to Actium*, 233-247.

⁴¹ For Greek text see, R. L. Cholmeley, *The Idylls of Theocritus* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1901).

upon his subjects (85-134).⁴² The hymn concludes with the promise: “I shall continue to speak of you [Ptolemy] as other demi-gods” (135).

Evidence for the composition and singing of hymns increases in the age of imperial Rome as hymns form a major component of emperor worship – so much so that these duties were given to a professional writer of hymns to emperors, referred to as a θεολόγος or σεβαστολόγος.⁴³ One of the responsibilities of the θεολόγος was to publicize the emperor’s benefactions, powers, and achievements by composing hymns that would then be sung by choirs at provincial imperial cults.⁴⁴

This is exemplified in an inscription containing a decree that “the choir of all Asia, gathering at Pergamum on the most holy birthday of Sebastos Tiberius Caesar god, performs a task that contributes greatly to the glory of Sebastos in hymning the imperial house and performing sacrifices to the Sebastan gods....”⁴⁵ Augustus declares: “my name was incorporated into the hymns of the Salii by decree of the Senate” (*Res Gestae* 10.1). Dio Cassius also lists as one of the many honors bestowed upon Augustus “that his name should be included in their hymns *equally with those*

⁴² The propaganda that legitimates kingship through descent from Zeus, military exploits, piety, and benefactions to his subjects stems from the ideology of Alexander the Great. See Alan A. Samuel, “The Ptolemies and the Ideology of Kingship,” in *Hellenistic History and Culture* (ed. Peter Green; Hellenistic Culture and Society 9; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), xx-xx, here, 181.

⁴³ At Pergammum there is an inscription that refers to P. Aelius Pompeianus who is a composer and rhapsodist (in the cult of) divine Hadrian, *theologos* of the temples in Pergamon.” Another inscription describing the task of the θεολόγος states that in the celebration of the deceased Augustus’ birthday, the hymn-conductor must “crown with garlands the hymn-singers and the mysteries in the choir hall.” Quoted from Allen Brent, “John as Theologos: The Imperial Mysteries and the Apocalypse,” *JSNT* 75 (1999): 75-92, here, p. 90 and p. 96.

⁴⁴ Encomiastic competitions for kings were frequent and functioned to publicize the honors of the ruler. See Price, “Gods and Emperors,” 95; Brent, “John as Theologos,” 91-92. Collins, “The Psalms and the Origin of Christology,” 113-123.

⁴⁵ See R. Cognat et al., *Inscriptiones Graecae ad Res Romanas Pertinentes*. Quoted from Price, “Rituals and Power,” 59.

of the gods (τοὺς ὕμνους αὐτὸν ἐξ Ἰσοῦ τοῖς θεοῖς) (51.20.1).” Suetonius recounts the story of the crew of an Alexandrian ship who, when Augustus sailed by, “put on white robes and garlands, burned incense, wished him all good fortune, and sang praises” (Suet. *Aug.* 98). Simon Price mentions that a certain Coan distinguished himself by winning contests for writing encomia “to the founder of the city Sebastos Caesar and the benefactors Tiberius Caesar and Germanicus Caesar and all their house *and to all the other gods* in each city.”⁴⁶ Dio says the senate gathered around his throne and “wasted the day in singing laudations and prayers in his presence” (59.24.5). Tacitus says that Nero had 5,000 knights who followed him and “day and night kept up a thunder of applause, and applied to the emperor’s person the voice and epithets of deities” (*Annals* 14.15).⁴⁷ Antony is said to have “hymned [Caesar] as a heavenly god” (ὡς θεὸν οὐρανίου ὕμνει) because of his exploits (Appian, *Civil War* 2.146). Steven Friesen notes the decree from the provincial council of Asia:

Since it is appropriate to provide a public display of reverence and of pious consideration toward the imperial household during the year, the hymnodes from all Asia – coming together in Pergamon on the most holy birthday of Sebastos Tiberius Caesar God – complete a great work to the glory of the assembly, making hymns to the imperial house and completing sacrifices to the gods Sebastoi....⁴⁸

While the content of most of these encomia have not survived, testimony to their frequent occurrence is widespread and the ideological content of the hymns can be discerned from the numerous honors and praises found in inscriptions.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Price, “Gods and Emperors,” 95 n. 96.

⁴⁷ See Aune, “The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial on the Apocalypse of John,” 16.

⁴⁸ Quoted from Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John*, 105.

⁴⁹ Price, “Gods and Emperors,” 95.

One frequently occurring motif is the praise of the ruler for *creating or re-creating* a peaceful new world order. For example, in the Priene Letter of the Roman proconsul Augustus is spoken of with cosmological language as the creator of a new world:

It is hard to tell whether the birthday of the most divine Caesar is a matter of greater pleasure or benefit. We could justly hold it to be equivalent to the beginning of all things (τῶν πάντων ἀρχῇ), and he has restored at least to serviceability, if not to its natural state, every form that had become imperfect and fallen into misfortune; and he has given a different aspect to the whole world, which blithely would have embraced its own destruction if Caesar had not been born for the common benefit of all. Therefore people would be right to consider this to have been the beginning of the breath of life (ἀρχὴν τοῦ βίου καὶ τῆς ζωῆς) ... and since it is difficult to render thanks in due measure for his great benefactions unless in each case we should devise some new method of repayment....⁵⁰

The birthday of Augustus clearly signals the creation, or better – new creation of a new world.⁵¹ The praise that speaks of Augustus’ appearance as the “beginning of all things” and the “beginning of the breath of life” for the people refers to his powerful benefactions “who brought war to an end and set everything in peaceful order (τὸν παύσαντα μὲν πόλεμον, κοσμήσοντα [δὲ εἰρήνην]).”⁵² Augustus has “surpassed the benefactors born before him, but not even leaving those to come any hope of surpassing him; and whereas the birthday of the god marked for the world the beginning of good tidings through his coming...”⁵³ Nero is also praised as “the lord

⁵⁰ *Documents Illustrating the Reigns of Augustus and Tiberius*, collected by Victor Ehrenberg and A. H. M. Jones (2nd edition; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), 98a, lines 4-17.

⁵¹ On the religious strategy of depicting the emperors as creators of a new world order, see Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John*, 122-142.

⁵² *Documents Illustrating the Reigns of Augustus and Tiberius*, 98b, lines 35-36.

⁵³ *Documents Illustrating the Reigns of Augustus and Tiberius*, 98b, lines 39-41.

of the whole world (παντὸς κόσμου κύριος)” for being “a benefactor of Greece.”⁵⁴ The ideology of divine honors bestowed upon rulers who have performed benefactions for humanity, particularly bringing peace by ending war, is evident and frequently blends into praise of the ruler as creator or re-creator.⁵⁵

One can observe this motif in the hymns to Augustus penned by the poet Horace. The interweaving of cosmological motifs with military victories is particularly striking. Thus, Horace praises Augustus since his reign has “brought back abundant crops to our fields and restored to our Jove the standards stripped from the proud portals of the Parthians. And freed from wars, has closed the sanctuary of Janus Quirinus” (*Ode* 4.15.5-10).⁵⁶ In his *Carmen Saeculare*, Horace situates praise of Augustus within praise of the gods (1-4).⁵⁷ Augustus’ dominion is so great that “sea and land acknowledge his hand of power” (53-54), and “Plenty comes too and brings her horn of abundance” (59-60). The image of peaceful, fertile abundance and complete rule over land and sea magnifies the extent of Augustus’ cosmological dominion.⁵⁸ In another hymn, he praises Augustus’ reign, for the emperor has given peace to his subjects (4.5.33-36) and agricultural productivity (4.5.37-41). Throughout his hymns one finds the frequent refrain that Augustus is

⁵⁴ W. Dittenberger (editor), *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum*, 814, lines 30-35.

⁵⁵ On this, see James R. Harrison, *Paul and the Imperial Authorities at Thessalonica and Rome: A Study in the Conflict of Ideology* (WUNT 2.273; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2011), 63-65.

⁵⁶ I am using Sidney Alexander, *The Complete Odes and Satires of Horace* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

⁵⁷ See Thomas Habinek, *The World of Roman Song: From Ritualized Speech to Social Order* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 152-157; Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 102-105.

⁵⁸ On this as part of Augustus’ propaganda strategy, see Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, 172-183.

the earthly ruler who rules in behalf of the heavenly Zeus (1.12.50-60). Jupiter reigns in heaven, and so similarly Augustus reigns over the empire (3.5.1-6).⁵⁹

Many of the preceding motifs coalesce in Pliny's *Panegyricus*, a three-day performance praising Trajan as an ideal ruler (*Ep.* 3.18).⁶⁰ First, Pliny praises Trajan for though he is a man (2.3-7), he was elected by Jupiter, equal with the gods in virtue, and rules on behalf of the gods (1.3-6; 5.2-3; 56.3). The gods insure his health and safety as long as the emperor does the same for his subjects (67.5; 68.1-3). Second, the ruler's primary task and the reason for bestowing praise upon him are his gifts to his subjects (2.8; 6.3-4; 50; 52.6-7).⁶¹ In addition to securing peace for the empire, his rule ushers in a season of agricultural fertility (31-32). Third, Trajan powerfully rules over the entire world. His very "word or gesture of command [can] rule land and sea and determine peace or war" (4.4). He brings an end to wars and dissension thereby ushering in a time of peace (5.6-9; 80.3).

d. Hymns and Prophetic Praises to the Davidic King in Israel's Scriptures

For my argument it is also necessary to examine the role of the hymns and poems composed in honor of King David or a coming ruler, for the Colossian Christ-hymn evidences some of the same vocabulary. The LXX Psalms in particular testify to the

⁵⁹ On the association between Augustus and the gods, see Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, 230-238. In the odes of Horace, see Gordley, *Teaching through Song in Antiquity*, 126-133.

⁶⁰ For text and translation, see Betty Radice, *Pliny: Letters and Panegyricus* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969). See Habinek, *The World of Roman Song*, 214-215. For more helpful detail on the kingship ideology of Pliny's *Panegyricus*, see Smith, *Christ the King*, 81-83; Gordley, *Teaching through Song in Antiquity*, 139-145; Lester K. Born, "The Perfect Prince According to the Latin Panegyrists," *American Journal of Philology* 55 (1934): 20-35.

⁶¹ Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 324.

practice of singing praises, uttering prayers, and composing oracles in honor of Israel's kings.⁶² Throughout the Psalms the king is praised with language reserved for God given that the king has been promised to share in the Lord's rule (e.g., "I have been established by him as king on Zion his holy mountain,"; "Ask me and I will give the nations as your heritage, and the ends of the earth as your possession," Ps. 2:6, 8).⁶³ The king is God's vicegerent who rules on the Lord's behalf, provides deliverance for his people, and whose worldwide dominion parallels God's dominion. The king is thereby worthy of exalted honorifics and hymnic honors. As was the case with Hellenistic/Roman royal propaganda, a central component of Israelite royal ideology is the godlike depiction and status of the king.

For example, LXX Ps. 44, the only hymn in the Psalter that *directly addresses the king*, begins: "out of my heart erupts a good song (λόγον ἀγαθόν), I speak my works to the king (τῷ βασιλεῖ)" (LXX Ps. 44:2a). It is remarkable that the psalmist addresses the king as God: "your throne, O God, is forever and ever" (ὁ θρόνος, ὁ θεός, εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος, v. 7; cf. Heb. 1:8).⁶⁴ The king is addressed as God by virtue of his sharing God's throne.⁶⁵ The king is thereby *the* representative of divine

⁶² Many of the Psalms likely began as royal oracles and petitions on behalf of the king. See Scott R. A. Starbuck, *Court Oracles in the Psalms: The So-Called Royal Psalms in their Ancient Near Eastern Context* (SBLDS 172; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999).

⁶³ Erhard S. Gerstenberger refers to Psalm 2 as a messianic hymn. See his *Psalms: Part One: With an Introduction to Cultic Poetry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 48.

⁶⁴ The statement has troubled interpreters as the king appears to be addressed as God. On this, see Aubrey R. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1967), 30 n. 1. Mark W. Hamilton [*The Body Royal: The Social Poetic of Kingship in Ancient Israel* (Biblical Interpretation Series 78; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 49] in commenting on Ps. 45 (MT) rightly states: "A central feature of the royal propaganda is thus the extraordinary, godlike status of the king."

⁶⁵ Hamilton, *The Body Royal*, 52-53.

kingship in a way reminiscent of the ruler cults.⁶⁶ As a result of the king's love of righteousness, "God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions" (v. 8). The psalmist concludes: "I will make your name be celebrated in all generations; therefore the peoples will praise you forever" (v. 18).

The depiction of the king as God's representative, through the sharing of his throne, is reminiscent of the royal coronation hymn of LXX Ps. 109:

The Lord said to my Lord (εἶπεν ὁ κύριος τῷ κυρίῳ μου), 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.' The Lord sends out from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your foes (κατακυρίευσεν ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ἐχθρῶν σου). With you is rule (μετά σοῦ ἡ ἀρχή) on the day of your power, in the radiance of the saints, from the womb I have begotten you before the morning star" (109:1-3).⁶⁷

The LXX psalm appears to assume (or at least makes the interpretation plausible) the King's pre-existence with the statement: "from the womb, I have begotten you before the morning star" (ἐκ γαστρὸς πρὸ ἑωσφόρου ἐξεγέννησά σε, v 3b).⁶⁸ Further, David speaks here not only of God as Lord but of a *coming* king as

⁶⁶ This is also briefly noted by Adela Yarbro Collins who suggests royal statements like this may have been the soil out of which the early church affirmed the divine identity of Jesus. See "The Worship of Jesus and the Imperial Cult," in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus* (ed. Carey C. Newman, et al.; Supplements to the Study for the Journal of Judaism 63; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 234-257, here, 239-240.

⁶⁷ On LXX Ps. 109 as a liturgical royal coronation hymn used to publically address the king, see S. E. Gillingham, *The Poems and Psalms of the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 225-226. Also, see Gunkel, *Einleitung*, 141; Sigmund Mowinckel, *Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 2.153.

⁶⁸ So Adela Yarbro Collins and John J. Collins, *King and Messiah as Son of God: Divine, Human, and Angelic Messianic Figures in Biblical and Related Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 57-58. The MT is incredibly opaque (literally – "in sacred splendors from the womb of the dawn, to you the dew of the earth" [Ps. 110:3]). See Aquila H. I. Lee, *From Messiah to Preexistent Son: Jesus' Self-Consciousness and Early Christian Exegesis of Messianic Psalms* (WUNT 2; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2005), 113, who states: "...we admit that the final rendering of v. 3 [LXX Ps. 109:3] becomes capable of being understood by later readers (e.g., early Christians?) as implying the pre-existence of the messiah." Similarly but more broadly, see Horbury, *Jewish Messianism*, 96-97.

Lord whose δύναμις is derived from God and whose dominion will outstrip David's.⁶⁹ One day, the Psalmist says, every hostile rule will be overthrown by the king's rule.⁷⁰ In both Psalms 44 and 109, then, the king is God's agent who shares God's throne, rules in his behalf, and is worthy of hymnic honors.⁷¹

The worldwide dominion of the king is celebrated and lamented in LXX Ps. 88 where the psalmist situates God's promises to have a Davidic king rule creation within God's own rule over the seas and heavens (vv. 10-12):⁷²

I will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the rivers. He shall cry to me, "You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation!" I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of earth' (καὶ γὰρ πρωτότοκον θήσομαι αὐτόν, ὑψηλὸν παρὰ τοῖς βασιλεῦσιν τῆς γῆς) (Ps. 88:26-28).

The king's dominion over the seas and rivers is a gift from the Lord who himself rules "the raging of the sea" (88:10), and to whose rule belongs "the heavens, the earth is also yours, the world and all that is in it – you have founded them" (88:12).⁷³ God's destruction of his cosmic enemies (vv. 10-11) is the basis for the king's defeat

⁶⁹ Schaper, 106-107.

⁷⁰ See Mays, *The Lord Reigns*, 105.

⁷¹ Eaton, *Kingship and Psalms* (Studies in Biblical Theology 32; London: SCM, 1976), 142-146. Eaton points to numerous texts that associate the king incredibly closely with Yahweh (e.g., Pss. 18:20; 41:13; 61:5; 62:8; 63:8-10; 91:1,4).

⁷² Vv. 1-19 is a hymnic composition celebrating the righteous reign of God; vv. 20-38 is a poetic expansion of the covenant made to David in 2 Sam. 7; and vv. 39-53 is a lament that accuses God of breaking his covenant with David. See Knut M. Heim, "The (God-)Forsaken King of Psalm 89: A Historical and Intertextual Inquiry," in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar* (ed. John Day; Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 270; xx), 296-322, here, 296-299.

⁷³ Jon D. Levenson perceptively articulates how God's defeat of his enemies and his ensuing rule is the basis for King David's governance of creation. The interconnection between the rule of God and the rule of David is the reason for the great lament in LXX Ps. 88. See his *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 116-117; Hamilton, *The Body Royal*, 91.

of his earthly opponents (vv. xx).⁷⁴ Just as God rules from his heavenly throne (88:6-9), so one day will God establish the King's "throne as long as the heavens endure" (88:30). Just as the throne of the Lord is characterized by righteousness, justice, mercy, and truth (88:15), so is the King's throne secured by the Lord's mercy and fidelity (88:29-30). The Davidic king's rule thereby reflects and enacts God's heavenly dominion. There is an incredible correspondence between God's heavenly throne and the earthly king's reign.⁷⁵ Richard J. Clifford notes that the apparent "excess of royal claims" made on behalf of the king derive from the fact that the king shares in every aspect of Yahweh's rule.⁷⁶

Finally, LXX Psalm 71 is a prayer for the son of the king (v. 1b). It envisions his reign as one where "righteousness flourishes and peace abounds" (v. 7). Again, however, the king's righteous and peaceful reign would appear to be a participation in God's own just and righteous rule (71:1-2).⁷⁷ The scope of his "dominion (κατακυριεύσει) [is] from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth (περάτων τῆς οἰκουμένης)" (v. 8). All of the "kings will give obeisance before him

⁷⁴ J. J. M. Roberts ["The Enthronement of Yhwh and David: The Abiding Theological Significance of the Kingship Language of the Psalms," *CBQ* 64 (2002): 675-686], here, 679] states: "God puts David's hand on the Sea and his right hand on the Rivers, God's two cosmogonic enemies (v. 26). Thus, the victories of the Davidic king are simply a participation in and reinstatement of God's primeval victories." Also, see Jerome F. Creach, *The Destiny of the Righteous in the Psalms* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2008), 91-93.

⁷⁵ James L. Mays, *The Lord Reigns: A Theological Handbook to the Psalms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 104.

⁷⁶ Richard J. Clifford, "Psalm 89: A Lament over the Davidic Ruler's Continued Failure," *HTR* 73 (1980): 35-47, here, 44-45; Heim, "The (God-)Forsaken King of Psalm 89," 314-315. Both are influenced by J. B. Dumortier, "Un Rituel D'intronisation: Le Ps. Lxxxix 2-38," 176-196. On the god-like character of the king, see Hamilton, *The Body Royal*, 91-92, who says that "the royal psalms make the king out to be a superhuman, almost divine figure."

⁷⁷ So also, Roberts, "The Enthronement of Yhwh and David," 682-683.

(προσκυνήσουσιν αὐτῷ πάντες οἱ βασιλεῖς), all nations serve him” (v. 11). The king’s rule insures abundant Eden-like agricultural fertility (v. 16; cf. v. 3; Joel 2:24; Isa. 25:6-9), and so he prays for “his name to endure forever, his fame to continue as long as the sun. May all nations be blessed in him; may they pronounce him happy” (v. 17). Repeatedly, the king is spoken of as worthy of praise *as a result of* his deliverance, mercy, and saving acts for the needy (vv. 4, 12-14).

Though they are not hymns, the bestowal of praise and honors upon Israel’s kings also takes the form of prophecy throughout poetic seams in the Pentateuch (LXX Gen. 49:8-12; Num. 23-24; Deut. 33:1-5).⁷⁸ These poetic compositions confirm what we have seen in the Psalms as they depict through their praise a *coming* Davidic king who is worthy of royal honors for his worldwide dominion.⁷⁹ Thus, in LXX Gen. 49:8-12, a prophecy that pertains to “the end of the days” (ἐπ’ ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν, 49:1b), we read that a royal descendant of Judah will receive worship: “your brothers will praise you” (σὲ αἰνέσασιν οἱ ἀδελφοί σου, v. 8a) and “the sons of your father will worship you (προσκυνήσουσίν σοι)” (v. 8c).⁸⁰ The poem looks forward to

⁷⁸ On royal praise taking the form of prophecy, see Horbury, *Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ*, 127-132. On the frequency of Gen. 49:8-12 and Num. 23-24 in Second-Temple Jewish messianic texts, see Novenson, *Christ among the Messiahs*, 56-58.

⁷⁹ The oracle of Judah was understood by both Christians and Jews as looking forward to an ideal king. See J. Blenkinsopp, “The Oracle of Judah and the Messianic Entry,” *JBL* 80 (1961): 55-64, here, 56-57. John H. Sailhamer [*The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 324] argues that these poems (including Exod. 15:1-22) are part of a deliberate editorial strategy of giving the Pentateuch a royal shape. On the royal and potentially messianic focus of Gen. 49:8-12, see T. Desmond Alexander, “Messianic Ideology in Genesis,” *The Lord’s Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts* (eds. Philip E. Satterthwaite et al., Grand Rapids: Baker, xx), 19-39, here, 32-37.

⁸⁰ The coming eschatological focus of the poems is indicated by the phrase “in the last days.” See Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 468.

a “ruler from Judah (ἄρχων ἐξ Ιουδα)” who alone “is the expectation of the nations (αὐτὸς προσδοκία ἐθνῶν)” (cf. Isa. 11:10; Rom. 15:12). This royal figure will receive praise for his victories over the enemies of God’s people that results in the deliverance of Israel and Eden-like fertility in the land (v. 8, 9b, 11-12).⁸¹ Or again in LXX Numbers 24, Balaam prophesies of a coming king who “will rule over many nations (κυριεύσει ἐθνῶν πολλῶν), and his kingdom (βασιλεία αὐτοῦ) shall be exalted (ὕψωθήσεται) above Gog, and his kingdom shall be increased (αὐξηθήσεται ἡ βασιλεία αὐτοῦ)” (24:7). This royal figure will “destroy the rulers of Moab, will plunder all the sons of Seth, and Edom will be his inheritance, and his enemy Esau will be his inheritance, for Israel has acted with strength” (24:17b-18).⁸² In short, the king’s dominion will be all encompassing. For this reason, royal honors are befitting for him: “the glories of rulers are in him” (τὰ ἔνδοξα ἀρχόντων ἐν αὐτῷ, 23:21). And in the Song of Moses in LXX Deuteronomy 33, Moses prophesies of a time when there “will be a ruler in the beloved one” (ἔσται ἐν τῷ ἡγαπημένῳ ἄρχων, v. 5a).⁸³ The “ruler” likely refers to a coming Israelite king in the midst of Israel.⁸⁴

⁸¹ On which, see Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 325-330.

⁸² The dominion of the king is explicitly an eschatological reign as indicated by the note that it concerns “the end of the days” (ἐπ’ ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν, LXX Num. 24:14b). The coming king of Numbers 23-24 appears to be the same figure hoped-for in Genesis 49:8-12. Compare Num. 24:9 (“He crouched, he lay down like a lion, and like a lioness; who will arouse him?”) with Gen. 49:9 (“He crouches down, he lays down like a lion, and like a lioness; who will arouse him?”). The text is reminiscent of the messianic oracle of LXX Isa. 11:1 (“a bloom shall rise up from the root”). Gen 49 and Isa. 11 have certainly been taken in a messianic sense in Rev. 5:5. See Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 331, 335; Horbury, *Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ*, 50.

⁸³ All three prophetic poems use the language of ἄρχων to refer to a coming king.

From the Psalms and Pentateuch, we have seen Israel's king praised through the address of a hymn (Ps. 44), the promise of sharing God's throne and worldwide dominion (Pss. 89; 109; Num. 24:7, 17-18), the promise of worship and obeisance (Ps. 71:11; Gen. 49:8; Num. 23:21), and the acclamations of "God" (Ps. 44:7) and "Lord" (Ps. 109:1). Most remarkable is the extensive overlap between God's dominion and the King's dominion over creation resulting in an almost God-like depiction of Israel's ruler. God's royal rule over the entirety of creation is the basis for the king's participation in ruling and sustaining the cosmos. The relationship between God and King illuminates the Chronicler's surprising depiction of the Lord and King David both receiving worship.

Then David said to the whole assembly, 'Bless the Lord your God (Εὐλογήσατε κύριον τὸν θεόν).' And all the assembly blessed the Lord, the God of their ancestors, and bowed their heads and prostrated themselves before the Lord *and the king* (καὶ εὐλόγησεν πᾶσα ἡ ἐκκλησία κύριον τὸν θεὸν τῶν πατέρων αὐτῶν καὶ κάμψαντες τὰ γόνατα προσεκύνησαν τῷ κυρίῳ καὶ τῷ βασιλεῖ). The Lord highly exalted (ἐμεγάλυνεν κύριος) Solomon in the sight of all Israel, and bestowed upon him such royal majesty (ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ δόξαν βασιλέως) as had not been on any king before him in Israel (1 Chron. 29:20, 25).

The Chroniclers' depiction, not unlike what has been observed with Hellenistic and Roman rulers, indicates that because of God's investiture of glory and dominion to the Davidic king, the earthly king is able to receive the same honors as God.⁸⁵ So

⁸⁴ Horbury [*Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ*, 51] nicely summarizes these three poetic texts of praise from the LXX: "...these LXX passages point to a consistent set of messianic hopes, constituting an expectation centred on a royal messiah which was sufficiently central and widespread among Jews of the third century to be included in the interpretation of the Pentateuch."

⁸⁵ Similarly Horbury, *Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ*, 132; cf. Scott W. Hahn, *The Kingdom of God as Liturgical Empire: A Theological Commentary on 1-2 Chronicles* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Press, 2012), 97.

closely identified with God is the king that he is able to receive the worship reserved for God.⁸⁶ The author, like the Psalmist (e.g., Ps. 44:7; 109), notes that the son of David shares God's throne: "Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord, succeeding his father David as king; he prospered, and all Israel obeyed him" (1 Chron. 29:23).⁸⁷ Earlier the Chronicler has had David declare that the Lord "has chosen my son Solomon to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel (καθίσαι αὐτὸν ἐπὶ θρόνου βασιλείας κυρίου ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ)" (1 Chron. 28:5b).⁸⁸ It is this sharing of *God's throne* that enables the king to share in God's reign and to receive both worship and obedience as God's earthly ruler (29:20, 23).⁸⁹

e. Praising Kings and Rulers

From the preceding examination we have seen that hymns for kings and rulers was widespread throughout the ancient world as a way of bestowing honors upon kings.

⁸⁶ Matthew Lynch [xxx] states that this act "is unprecedented insofar as a human (David) *and* Yhwh receive the same acts of ritual prostration."

⁸⁷ A connection between LXX Ps. 44:7 and 1 Chron. 29:23 is, in fact, argued by Joachim Schaper, *Eschatology in the Greek Psalter* (WUNT 2.76; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1995), 80-81.

⁸⁸ See Mark A. Throntveit, "The Idealization of Solomon as the Glorification of God in the Chronicler's Royal Speeches and Royal Prayers," in *The Age of Solomon: Scholarship at the turn of the Millennium* (Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East 11; ed. Lowell K. Handy; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 411-427, here, 421-423.

⁸⁹ On the notion of the ideal king as sharing in God's rule over creation such that the king is worthy of divine honorifics, one could also examine Philo's *Life of Moses* where Philo presents Moses as the ideal king who was deemed worthy of the honor of sharing the title "with the Father and Maker" and "who was named god and king (θεὸς καὶ βασιλεὺς) of the whole nation" (158). Moses' kingship consists in his "sharing God's possessions" such that he rules over "the wealth of the whole earth and sea and rivers, and of all the other elements and the combinations which they form. ... Therefore, each element obeyed him as its master, changed its natural properties and submitted to his command...." (155-157). On Moses as ideal king in Philo, see Erwin R. Goodenough, *By Light, Light: The Mystic Gospel of Hellenistic Judaism*, 171-177; Ray Barraclough, "Philo's Politics: Roman Rule and Hellenistic Judaism," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, 2.1 (1984): 418-553, here, 487-491. More broadly, see Wayne A. Meeks, "Moses as God and King," in *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough* (ed. Jacob Neusner; Studies in the History of Religions; Leiden: Brill, 1968), 354-371.

These hymnic honors are bestowed in response to the belief that the king is the visible representation of God, who rules and sustains the cosmos, and has benefited his subjects through great benefactions. The praise, then, is a way of giving divine honors to a king who has granted gifts to his subjects. Given that ancient kingship ideology stressed the close relationship between the god(s) and the king, and in light of the benefactions-for-honor system, the praises often speak of the king with language usually reserved for the god(s). The king, then, is often portrayed as God's earthly representative who shares his throne, shares divine honorifics and titles, and perhaps most importantly rules over all of creation on behalf of the god(s). The king establishes and maintains divine cosmic stability in his rule.

II. Colossians 1:15 – 20 as a Panegyric to Christ the King

My argument regarding Col. 1:15-20 is that the text is a royal encomium (ὁ βασιλικὸς λόγος) – perhaps best classified as a prose hymn⁹⁰ – written to bestow praise upon the messianic king who, in broad accordance with ancient kingship ideology: a) is God's elected royal (Davidic) vicegerent, who b) creates, sustains and rules over creation, and c) rules over his people and establishes peace between them and God by reconciling the entire cosmos to God.⁹¹ These motifs are ubiquitous in ancient kingship ideology, and we have had occasion to witness them in the preceding

⁹⁰ So much has been written on the hymnic features of Colossians 1:15-20 that it would be cumbersome to justify this generic convention here in detail. I simply note the following: linguistic and thematic parallels ("firstborn of creation," 1:15/"firstborn from the dead," 1:18; "all things have been created through him and for him," 1:16/"to reconcile all things through him to himself," 1:20; "he is before all things," 1:17/"so that he might be first in all things," 1:18; "who is the image of the invisible God," 1:15/"who is the beginning," 1:18).

⁹¹ With respect to Philippians 2:5-11, Collins, "The Psalms the Origins of Christology,"¹²³ has suggested, though without reference to any examination of kingship ideology, that "Paul adapted the form of the Greek prose hymn in order to instruct the Philippians in cultural terms familiar to them."

discussion of hymns to rulers. It *should* go without saying that Christ's supremacy, pre-eminence, and rule is emphasized throughout the hymn, whereas not one word is given to wisdom. What remains now, then, is to establish the presence (part II) and function (part III) of these royal motifs within the encomium.

a. *Christ the King is God's Son and God's Image*

"He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the son of his love" (1:13).

The hymns and encomia examined above have afforded the opportunity to see the frequent relationship between Zeus and his elected kings (e.g., "from Zeus come kings; for nothing is diviner than the kings of Zeus," Callimachus, *Hymn to Zeus*, 78-79) as well as that between Israel's God and his Davidic ruler (e.g., LXX Pss. 2, 71, 88, 109). Likewise, Paul's encomium to the Messiah in Colossians uses honorifics to describe the hymn's subject as God's king who participates in his rule as his royal representative. Each of these honorifics should be situated within a royal context.

The antecedent of ὅς (Col. 1:15a), and all the pronouns that follow, is not "Wisdom," nor is it left unspecified but, rather, is clearly stated as τοῦ υἱοῦ τῆς ἀγάπης αὐτοῦ ("the son of his love," v. 13b).⁹² This son is unambiguously troped as a royal figure as he has his own τὴν βασιλείαν where his rescued subjects reside as ones who have been "delivered from the dominion of darkness (ἐρρύσατο ἡμᾶς ἐκ

⁹² The reference of the hymn as "the son of his love" is frequently missed when the hymn is isolated from its literary context. This allows for the mistaken insertion of personified "Wisdom" as the subject of the hymn. See also Seyoon Kim; Dunn, 87; Schweizer, 63-69.

τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ σκότους)” (v. 13).⁹³ Like any good king, the royal son has liberated his subjects from evil – “the dominion of darkness” (1:13) and “sins” (1:14).

The relationship between “the Father” (τῷ πατρί, v. 12) and “the son of his love” echoes Israel’s royal ideology whereby the king is a son of God.⁹⁴ More specifically, the language echoes Nathan’s oracle to the house of David: “I will be a father to him, and he will be a son to me” (ἐγὼ ἔσομαι αὐτῷ εἰς πατέρα, καὶ αὐτὸς ἔσται μοι εἰς υἱόν, 2 Sam. 7:14a).⁹⁵ Increasing the resonances of the echo of 2 Sam. 7 in Paul’s honorific τοῦ υἱοῦ τῆς ἀγάπης αὐτοῦ is the reverberation of David’s statement “what is my house that *you have loved me* in this way (ἡγάπηκάς με ἕως τούτων, 2 Sam. 7:18)?” The language of “beloved son” here is less a matter of emotion, as it is a description of God’s election of the King to be his earthly representative.

As is well known, numerous later Israelite texts interact with Nathan’s royal oracle in stressing Israel’s king as Son of God who rules in God’s stead.⁹⁶ Thus, in Ps. 2, in response to “the kings of the earth and the rulers” (οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς καὶ ἄρχοντες, v. 2a) who plot “against the lord and against his anointed one” (κατὰ τοῦ κυρίου καὶ κατὰ τοῦ χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ, v. 2b), God institutes his king to rule in his stead:

⁹³ It should not escape the reader’s notice that one of the primary responsibilities of the good king was to deliver and rescue his people from their enemies. See chapter five.

⁹⁴ Gerald Cooke, “The Israelite King as Son of God,” *ZAW* 73 (1961): 202-225; Trygve N. D. Mettinger, *King and Messiah: The Civil and Sacral Legitimation of the Israelite Kings* (Coniectanea Biblica Old Testament 8; Lund: Gleerup, 1976), 259-268; Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms*, 146-149.

⁹⁵ For more detail, see Christopher A. Beetham, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letter to the Colossians* (Biblical Interpretation Series 96; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 97-112.

⁹⁶ E.g., see 1 Chron. 17; Jeremiah 33:14-22; Zechariah 6:12-13; *Pss. Sol.* 17. See William M. Schniedewind, *Society and the Promise to David: The Reception History of 2 Samuel 7:1 – 17* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Sam Janse, “*You are my Son*”: *The Reception History of Psalm 2 in Early Judaism and the Early Church* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 51-75; Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 540-542.

“the Lord said to me, ‘You are my son (Υἱός μου εἶ σύ), today I have begotten you’” (v. 7). The portrait is of a rebellious group of rulers and authorities who are pacified by God’s royal son who is enthroned to reign over them.⁹⁷ The enthronement decree (v. 7) unpacks the Davidic figure’s status as one who has been established “king by him” (βασιλεὺς ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ, v. 6a).⁹⁸ God promises to give the king “the nations as your inheritance” (ἔθνη τὴν κληρονομίαν σου, Ps. 2:8).⁹⁹ The Davidic king thereby participates as gift in the rule of God his father, and is commissioned to rule on God’s behalf.¹⁰⁰ And again in Ps. 88 the king is “exalted above all the kings of the earth” (v. 29) as a result of his sonly relation to God his Father (v. 28).

The Israelite king as God’s son who rules in God’s stead as a gift fits nicely with Paul’s language where “the beloved Son” is *the authorized agent through whom* God accomplishes deliverance, redemption, and forgiveness of sins (1:13-14).¹⁰¹ Thus,

⁹⁷ Speaking of Ps. 2:1-3, James L. Mays [*The Lord Reigns: A Theological Handbook to the Psalms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994, 109] states: “The question [of v. 3] gathers up the entire scene of governments and rulers, grasping and consolidating power, working out their destiny in terms of force; and it interprets the machinations of the whole thing theologically as rebellion against the Lord and his Anointed.”

⁹⁸ On Psalm 2 as reflecting an enthronement liturgy, see Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, 67; Hamilton, *The Body Royal*, 60. On the reception history of Psalm 2, see *1 Enoch* 48:4, 10; Acts 4:26. Also, see Paul Maiberger, “Das Verständnis von Psalm 2 in der Septuaginta, im Targum, in Qumran, im frühen Judentum und im Neuen Testament,” in *Beiträge zur Psalmenforschung. Psalm 2 und 22* (ed. Josef Schreiner; Forschung zur Bibel; Würzburg; Echter, 1988), 85-151.

⁹⁹ Compare with Paul’s statement regarding the saints who have been qualified “for a share of the inheritance” (εἰς τὴν μερίδα τοῦ κλήρου, 1:12).

¹⁰⁰ So Collins and Collins, *King and Messiah as Son of God*, 22-24. Mays, *The Lord Reigns*, 112, says that when “the king was named ‘son of God,’ the title was a confession of faith that the king was the representative and agent of the deity in such unity and coherence that only the term ‘son’ could display the correspondence and claims between the two.”

¹⁰¹ That the royal son of God is entirely dependent upon God in Psalm 2 is rightly emphasized by Jamie A. Grant, *The King as Exemplar: The Function of Deuteronomy’s Kingship Law in the Shaping of the Book of Psalms* (SBL 17; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 58-60.

Paul sets the encomium in an explicitly royal messianic context, and prepares the audience for the hymn's expansion on the nature of the king's dominion and rule.

"He is the image of the invisible God" (1:15a)

As the rhetorical handbooks suggest beginning the encomium with the ruler's honorable ancestry, so Paul uses a royal honorific to describe the son of God – "he is the image of the invisible God" (ὅς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ ἀοράτου, 1:15a). In both Jewish and pagan contexts, rulers are spoken of as images of the gods.¹⁰² As living images of the gods, the kings rule and maintain cosmic harmony in the god's stead. Plato remarks that the wise king reproduces the divine image within himself in his rule (*Republic* 500B-502A). The Ptolemaic king Philopator is referred to as εἰκὼν τοῦ Διός, while Ptolemy V is spoken of as εἰκὼν ζωσα τοῦ Διός.¹⁰³ In his *To an Uneducated Ruler* Plutarch says "the ruler is the image of God who orders all things" (ἄρχων δ' εἰκὼν θεοῦ τοῦ πάντα κοσμοῦντος, 780d). The ruler's divine image consists in the fact that "rulers serve god for the care and preservation of men" (780d-e). The king is responsible for maintaining cosmic harmony and distributing the gifts of the gods to humans (780f). Similarly, when Themistocles has an interview with the Persian king, he is told that for Persians "it is the fairest of all to honor the king, and

¹⁰² The religious context most often proposed for understanding 1:15a is Hellenistic Jewish speculation upon personified Wisdom or a Logos/heavenly man figure. See Ronald Cox, *By the Same Word: Creation and Salvation in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity* (BZNW 145; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 172-173. E.g., "She [i.e., Wisdom] is...an image of his goodness" (εἰκὼν τῆς ἀγαθότητος αὐτοῦ, Wisdom of Solomon 7:26). Philo says that the Logos is "...the man after God's image" (ὁ κατ' εἰκόνα ἄνθρωπος, Philo, *Conf.* 146). Against this, however, stands the fact that Paul says Christ *is* the image of God and not made according to, or after God's image. Further, in Wisdom of Solomon, Wisdom is simply an attribute of God's goodness.

¹⁰³ See BDAG, εἰκὼν, 282.

to pay obeisance to him as the image of the god (ὡς εἰκόνα θεοῦ) who is the preserver of all things" (*Themistocles* 125). And Diotogenes says "the royal office is an imitation of god" (Stob. 4.7.62)

But most scholars rightly discern that the primary context for understanding the son as "the image of the invisible God" is the figure of Adam who was made "according to the image of God" (κατ' εἰκόνα θεοῦ, Gen. 1:27).¹⁰⁴ Without entering into a detailed discussion of what this precisely entails, one would not go astray by noting Adam's commission to rule and have dominion. As God's image, Adam is created to "rule" over all of creation (Gen. 1:26). All of creation is to be the dominion for God's image as it is commanded to "increase and multiply and fill the earth, and have dominion over it and rule over (Ἀυξάνεσθε καὶ πληθύνεσθε καὶ πληρώσατε τὴν γῆν καὶ κατακυριεύσατε αὐτῆς καὶ ἄρχετε...)" all creation (Gen. 1:28). The language is undeniably royal as it uses the language of dominion, rule, and lordship and even commands "the image of God" to expand the dominion over all creation. Psalm 8 confirms this, for here humanity is created to have dominion over God's creation (Ps. 8:4-8). Whatever, then, the "image of God," might mean, it is clearly related in a representative way to the God that it images and to the creation over which it rules and has dominion.¹⁰⁵

Most have discerned in Gen. 1:26-28 and Ps. 8 a royal ideology akin to what is found in other Ancient Near Eastern cultures where the king is the representative or

¹⁰⁴ Seyoon Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective*, 166-167; Nils A. Dahl, "Christ, Creation and the Church," in *The Background of the New Testament*, 432-xx.

¹⁰⁵ Phyllis A. Bird, " 'Male and Female He Created Them': Gen 1:27b in the Context of the Priestly Account of Creation," *HTR* 74 (1981): 129-159, here, 137-138.

even incarnation of the god, often with the king establishing his image in the temple of conquered territories as a sign of his rule.¹⁰⁶ I will cite just two of numerous examples.¹⁰⁷ In the Tukulti-Ninurta epic the Assyrian king is described *within a hymn* as “the eternal image of Enlil” and the “firstborn son” of the god.¹⁰⁸ The relationship between Enlil and the king is one where the king participates in the god’s rule and produces harmony for creation. David Clines notes that Assyrian kings were consistently spoken of as the image of God, and he notes the king Esarhaddon who is addressed by his official: “The father of the king, my lord, was the very image of Bel, and the king, my lord, is likewise the very image of Bel.”¹⁰⁹

Returning to Gen. 1:26-28, Gerhard von Rad rightly states, “God set man in the world as the sign of his own sovereign authority, in order that man should uphold and enforce his – God’s – claims as lord.”¹¹⁰ Adam is commissioned to “subdue” (כָּבַשׁ) and “rule” (רָדָה) over the earth as God’s sovereign representative (Gen. 1:28), maintaining and expanding the divine order of God’s creation.¹¹¹ These words are consistently used throughout the Hebrew Scriptures to denote the authority and

¹⁰⁶ Phyllis A. Bird, “ ‘Male and Female He Created Them’ ”, 139-141. Shalmanesar the Assyrian king, after conquering a new land, fashions an image, which he equates with his image as a representation of his glory. See H. Frankfort, *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1954). Also, Mark G. Brett, “Earthing the Human in Genesis 1 – 3,” in *The Earth Story in Genesis* (eds. Norman C. Habel & Shirley Wurst), 77; Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 95-99.

¹⁰⁷ For more examples, see D. J. A. Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” *TynBul* 19 (1968): 55-103, here, 83-85; G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: a Biblical theology of the dwelling place of God* (NSBT 17; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 82-84; John Anthony Dunne, “The Regal Status of Christ in the Colossian ‘Christ-Hymn’: A Re-evaluation of the Influence of Wisdom Traditions,” *TrinJ* 32 (2011): 3-18, here, 11-13.

¹⁰⁸ W. G. Lambert, “Three Unpublished Fragments of the Tukulti-Ninurta Epic,” *Afo* 18 (1957): 38-51.

¹⁰⁹ Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 83. Cited from R. H. Pfeiffer, *State Letters of Assyria* (American Oriental Society; New Haven (1935) 9f. (no. 161).

¹¹⁰ Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology. Volume I. The Theology of Israel’s Historical Traditions* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 146.

¹¹¹ On God’s establishment of order in creation as a distinct concern and pattern of Gen. 1:1 – 2:3, see Bird, “ ‘Male and Female He Created Them’ ”, 136-137.

power of royal figures.¹¹² Significantly, the words frequently occur in eschatological contexts that look forward to an ideal messianic king who will rule God's kingdom.¹¹³ It is hard to escape the conclusion that Adam, as God's image, is the context for some later messianic praises where similar commands of "rule" are given to a coming Israelite king (Num. 24:17-19; Ps. 72:8-11). For example, in Psalm 110 the king at the right hand of God is commanded "Rule!" with linguistic echoes of Gen. 1.¹¹⁴ Adam is God's royal rule, imbued as God's chosen kingly son, who is commissioned to act as God's sovereign, subduing and ruling the earth for God.¹¹⁵

There is one more important aspect of "the image of God" in Gen. 1:26-28, namely, the statement that Adam was created "male and female" and was given a blessing to reproduce and procreate (1:28).¹¹⁶ One of the ways, then, in which humanity exercises its rule and dominion over creation is through the procreation of more image-bearers. So it is no accident that the second time the author refers to God's creation of Adam "according to the image of God" (κατ' εἰκόνα θεοῦ, 5:1) what then follows is a genealogy consisting in Adam's procreative activity.¹¹⁷

¹¹² E.g., see 1 Kgs. 5:4; 5:30; 9:23; 2 Chr. 8:10.

¹¹³ Note the insightful discussion of Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 59-60.

¹¹⁴ Compare Ps. 110:2 ("Rule [רדה] in the midst of your enemies") with Gen. 1:28 ("...and rule [ורדו] over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." See Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 112-113.

¹¹⁵ That Adam was believed to have been God's prototypical king is also a theme in Jewish traditions (Sir. 49:16; Jub. 2:14; 4 Ez. 6:53f; 2 Enoch 30:12; Philo, *On the Creation of the World* 136-150). Cf. Robin Scroggs, *The Last Adam: A Study in Pauline Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 25.

¹¹⁶ This is nicely stated by Paul Niskanen ["The Poetics of Adam: The Creation of אדם in the Image of אלהים," *JBL* 128 (2009): 417-436, here, 432]: "The context of Gen 1:26-28 speaks quite clearly of dominion; it also speaks quite clearly of the ADAM as male and female and the blessing of fertility." See also, Clines, "The Image of God in Man," 95.

¹¹⁷ Niskanen, "The Poetics of Adam," 433.

Situating εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ ἀοράτου in a royal context should occasion no surprise to the student of Paul given that when Adam is named in his epistles he appears in explicitly royal contexts (cf. Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:20-28).¹¹⁸ And as Sean McDonough has noted, when Paul uses the word εἰκὼν it almost always echoes Adam and the creation narrative of Gen. 1 (e.g., Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 11:7; 15:49; 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:4; Col. 3:10).¹¹⁹ The simple point here, then, is that when Paul names “the beloved son” as εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ ἀοράτου he taps into royal language, language that emphasizes God’s election of the Messiah to rule as his kingly representative over all of creation and thereby produce cosmic harmony.¹²⁰ A second point worth considering, though, is that if reproduction and procreation is a component of Genesis’ depiction of the image of God, then it may be that one of Christ’s tasks is to extend his royal dominion over his people.

b. Christ the Supreme King Creates and Rules

“the firstborn over all creation” (1:15b)

To that of “his beloved son” and “the image of the invisible God” Paul adds a third royal honorific: he is “the firstborn over all creation” (πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως,

¹¹⁸ In Rom. 5:12-21 the language of “rule” and “dominion” and spoken of in relation to Adam and Christ.” In 1 Cor. 15:20-28 Adam is spoken of in antithesis to Christ who “hands the kingdom over to God the Father” (v. 24), pacifies God’s enemies (vv. 24b-27), and who is the subject of the royal Psalms 8 and 110.

¹¹⁹ Sean M. McDonough, *Christ as Creator: Origins of a New Testament Doctrine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 90. The recent study by Stephanie Lorenzen rightly emphasizes that Paul’s use of “image” is primarily somatic, thus making an allusion to Wisdom unlikely. See her *Das paulinische Eikon-Konzept: Semantische Analysen zur Sapientia Salomonis, zu Philo und den Paulusbriefen* (WUNT 2.250; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2008).

¹²⁰ The royal representative function of Christ as the image of God accounts for the fact that he “reveals the invisible God” (italics mine). See Stephen E. Fowl, *The Story of Christ in the Ethics of Paul: An Analysis of the Function of the Hymnic Material in the Pauline Corpus* (JSNTSup; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 107.

1:15b).¹²¹ In Israel the firstborn son held a special place within the family as he was endowed with the father's inheritance, entrusted with his father's authority, and given a royal and priestly role within the family.¹²² Jacob declares to Reuben: "you are my firstborn, my strength and the *beginning* of my children" (πρωτότοκος μου σύ ισχύς καὶ ἀρχὴ τέκνων μου, LXX Gen. 49:3).¹²³ The Deuteronomist's statute protecting the inheritance of the firstborn, likewise, refers to him as *beginning* of his father's children (οὗτός ἐστιν ἀρχὴ τέκνων αὐτοῦ, Deut. 21:17b).¹²⁴ Given its associations with representation of one's father, royal privilege, and inheritance, πρωτότοκος is often used as more than a literal description of birth order and rather as an honorific as it is, for example, with Israel (Ex. 4:22; Jer. 38:9).¹²⁵

But of most importance for understanding Paul's description of Christ as "firstborn over all creation" is the Psalmist who refers to God's covenant with David: "I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth" (καὶ γὰρ

¹²¹ Philo does not refer to Wisdom or Logos as πρωτότοκος but rather as πρωτόγονος (*Somn* 1.215; *Conf.* 146). I am aware of no specific linguistic parallel to Col. 1:15a in Hellenistic Jewish or Middle Platonic literature. So Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 320-321.

¹²² See especially, (e.g., Gen. 25:25-34; 49:3; Deut. 21:15-17).

¹²³ The Targum's expand on the meaning: "Reuben, you are my first-born, my might, and the beginning of my strength. For you it would have been fitting to take three parts – the birthright, the priesthood, and royalty" (Gen. 49:3, *T. Onq.*). "Reuben, you are my first-born...you would have been worthy of the birthright, the dignity of the priesthood and the kingship. But because you sinned, my son, the birthright was given to Joseph, the kingship to Judah, and the priesthood to Levi" (Gen. 49:3, *T. Ps.-Jon.*). Quoted from Scott W. Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God's Saving Promises* (AYBRL; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 137.

¹²⁴ On which, see Jon D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 59-60. J. R. Porter, *The Extended Family in the Old Testament* (London: Edutext, 1967), 10: says the description of the firstborn as his father's strength is "almost a technical expression and which means that the son in question was endowed with the fullness of the father's authority and power."

¹²⁵ Some see an allusion to the royal figure of Adam. See Hermann Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of his Theology* (trans. John Richard de Witt; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 81, comments on the possible connection: "It [i.e., the term "firstborn"] does not denote temporal order merely, but order of rank, position of rulership, in which it is easy to discover a reminiscence of the position Adam occupied among all of creation, likewise in virtue of his creation after God's Image (Gen. 1:28ff)."

πρωτότοκον θήσομαι αὐτόν, ὑψηλὸν παρὰ τοῖς βασιλεῦσιν τῆς γῆς, LXX Ps. 88:28).

That this royal psalm *is the primary context* for Paul's statement is confirmed by the psalm's preceding verse which refers to the relationship between God and the king as that of Father and son: "He will cry to me, 'You are my Father (αὐτὸς ἐπικαλέσεται με Πατήρ μου εἴ σύ), my God, and the Rock of my salvation!'" (Ps. 88:27; cf. Col. 1:13b).¹²⁶ We have seen that as the most exalted of the kings of the earth, as God's own firstborn son, the Davidic ruler is given the gift of sharing in God's cosmic rule over all of creation. The Father's throne and the king's throne are *both* founded upon God's steadfast love (88:15 and vv. 29-30; cf. 44:5-7). The Father thus sets the king's "hand on the sea, and his right hand on the rivers" (Ps. 88:24; cf. vv. 10-12).¹²⁷ And as the most exalted of the kings of the earth, Yahweh promises to defeat the enemies of the king (ὠφελήσει ἐχθρὸς ἐν αὐτῷ, LXX Ps. 88:23a; συγκόψω τοὺς ἐχθροὺς αὐτόν, 88:24a; cf. Ps. 2:1-8).

"For in him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or lords, or rulers, or dominions; all things have been created through him and for him" (1:16)

¹²⁶ Many include Ps. 88:28 (LXX) as one text among many for understanding Col. 1:15 but very few unpack its meaning. See, however, McDonough, *Christ as Creator*, 89-92; Dunne, "The Regal Status of Christ in the Colossian 'Christ-Hymn,'" 13-14. It is surprising that after his fine insights into the regal nature of Col. 1:13, Beetham opts for Proverbs 8:22-31 as the context for understanding Col. 1:15b. See Beetham, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letter to the Colossians*, xx. McDonough, *Christ as Creator*, 178, understands Paul to have reasoned backward from Christ's redemptive work in new creation to his work in creation: "If eschatology forms the basis for proctology, one could argue that the protological πρωτότοκος is derived from the eschatological πρωτότοκος: because Jesus has become the firstborn of the new creation, it stands to reason he was πρωτότοκος of the first creation, with all the rights and privileges appertaining thereto."

¹²⁷ See my comments on Ps. 88 and the references to the scholarly literature on pp. 21-23.

Paul radicalizes the royal-messianic ideology by extending Christ's dominion over creation into an assertion that the firstborn son actually is the one "in whom all things have been created" (ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα, 1:16a), and the one "through whom and for whom all things have been created" (τὰ πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται, 1:16c).¹²⁸ That is, as the most "exalted of all the kings of the earth" (Ps. 88:28), God's royal son *not only rules but even creates the lesser rulers*, that is, the "thrones and lords and rulers and dominions" (εἴτε θρόνοι εἴτε κυριότητες εἴτε ἀρχαὶ εἴτε ἐξουσίαι, Col. 1:16).¹²⁹ Regardless of the exact identity of the lesser rulers,¹³⁰ the language used to describe them is political (cf. Eph. 1:21).¹³¹ That Christ's creative activity derives from his royal rule is again seen by the fact that the lesser rulers in 1:16 are the same "rulers and authorities" (τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ τὰς ἐξουσίας) who are publicly shamed and led in an imperial triumph in Christ (2:15b).¹³²

We have seen that the relationship between God and his elected king results in some incredibly exalted language, such that the king shares God's throne, is referred to as God or divine, and receives divine honors and acclamations. And if Ps.

¹²⁸ On the relationship between creation and eschatology, see N. A. Dahl, "Christ, Creation and the Church," in *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology: In Honour of Charles Harold Dodd* (eds. W. D. Davies and D. Daube; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 422-443.

¹²⁹ See also the royal use of πρωτότοκος for Christ in Rev. 1:5 (ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν καὶ ἄρχῶν τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς). Also, the term is employed in Heb. 1:6 in a context where Davidic messianism abounds (e.g., Ps. 2:8 in 1:2; Ps. 2:7 in 1:5; 2 Sam. 7:14 in 1:5b; Ps. 44:7 in 1:8; Ps. 109:1 in 1:13. See further, Joshua W. Jipp, "The Son's Entrance into the Heavenly World: The Soteriological Necessity of the Scriptural Catena in Hebrews 1.5-14," *NTS* 56 (2010): 557-575.

¹³⁰ That the entities in 1:16; 2:15 as well as the "elemental principles of the universe" (2:8, 20) are typical of Hellenistic and Jewish cosmological speculation has been argued convincingly by Eduard Schweizer, *JBL*; Clinton Arnold.

¹³¹ E.g., compare with Rev. 2:13; 13:2.

¹³² On the ritualization of shame in the Roman imperial celebration, see Peter Marshall, "A Metaphor of Social Shame: *THRIAMBEUEIN* in 2 Cor 2:14," *NovT* 25 (1983): 302-317.

88 (LXX) is the context for Col. 1:15b-16, then, Paul can be seen as making the claim that God's anointed Son not only rules creation but has been given from his Father the cosmic inheritance of creating all things. If God delegates all earthly rule and authority to his anointed one who is to maintain cosmic harmony and order, as "the strength of his father," as the royal psalms indicate (Ps. 2:6-8; 44; 72; 110:1-3), then it may be that Paul is simply, yet breathtakingly extending "the purview of the Messiah's authority to include primal creation."¹³³

"And he is before all things" (1:17a)

Paul's claim that the royal subject of his encomia "is before all things" (αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων, Col. 1:17a), a statement that may refer to both the pre-existence *and* pre-eminence of the son, can be situated within honors bestowed upon Israel's kings. There are at least two royal Psalms that allow for the possibility of an early Christian (or Jewish) interpretation of the figure as a *pre-existent coming messianic king*.¹³⁴ In LXX Psalm 109, Yahweh speaks of the king as: "from the womb, *before* the morning star I begat you" (ἐκ γαστρὸς πρὸ ἑωσφόρου ἐξεγέννησά σε, v 3b).¹³⁵ Similarly, in LXX Psalm 71, the translator translates v. 17, "his name endures before the sun" (Hebrew) with πρὸ τοῦ ἡλίου διαμενεῖ τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ and thereby creates the possibility for a temporal reading: "his name endures *before [the creation of] the sun*" (LXX Ps. 71:17b).¹³⁶ While the context does not demand an interpretation that

¹³³ McDonough, *Christ as Creator*, 67.

¹³⁴ Justin Martyr read both Psalm 72:17 and 109:3 as witnessing to a pre-existent messiah (see *Dialogue with Trypho* 45.4 and 76.7).

¹³⁵ See above pp. xx.

¹³⁶ Schaper, 93-107. See also Collins and Collins, *King and Messiah as Son of God*, 58.

results in a pre-existent Messiah, the use of the pronoun *πρό* makes it possible. The pre-existence of the messiah's name is attested in *1 Enoch* 48:2-3: "the Son of Man was named in the presence of the Lord of Spirits, and his *name before* the Chief of Days; and *before the sun* and the signs were created, *before* the stars of the heavens were made, his name was named *before* the Lord of the Spirits."¹³⁷

"And all things are held together in him" (1:17b)

The statement that "all things are held together in him" (τὰ πάντα δι' ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν, Col. 1:17b) – αὐτῷ standing in for the one termed son of God, image of God, and firstborn over all creation respectively – reflects the notion of the king as stabilizer of the cosmos.¹³⁸ The theme that the king stabilizes the cosmos by establishing upon earth divine heavenly harmony is a common *topos* within the Davidic psalms and imperial panegyrics. As seen above, Pss. 2, 45, 72, 89, and 110 depict the Davidic king as Yahweh's authorized, deputized ruler who stabilizes the created order on God's behalf. Commenting on Ps. 89, Jon Levenson speaks of God's gift of mastery over creation to the king: "It is now the Davidic throne that guarantees cosmic stability....David is YHWH's vicar on Earth."¹³⁹

¹³⁷ See the discussion in Lee, *From Messiah to Preexistent Son*, 109.

¹³⁸ Paul's statements in 1:17 do indeed bear some *general* resemblance to Hellenistic philosophical speculation upon the *logos*. Nevertheless, there are no specific linguistic parallels to 1:17b of which I am aware. Those advanced by Cox [*By the Same Word*, 171], Sir. 43:26; Wis. 8:1; Philo, *Her.* 23; *Fug.* 108-112, are general and unconvincing. McDonough, *Christ as Creator*, 187, is right to insist: "...a terse formula such as 'in him all things hold together' only makes sense when it is read within the larger philosophical or religious system within which it is embedded." And the broader framework or "religious system" that Paul has established is royal-messianic.

¹³⁹ Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 22-23. McDonough, *Christ as Creator*, 46-64, also discusses the broader relationship between cosmic order and earthly order and how a king is often depicted as the intermediate bridge between heaven and earthly harmony.

To give a few examples, in his *Panegyricus* for Trajan, Pliny declares the “Father of the universe rules all with a nod of his head” and can now devote himself to heaven’s concerns “since he has given you to us to fill his role with regard to the entire human race” (80.5). And the Pseudo-Pythagorean treatises on kingship consistently uphold the king as the guarantor of cosmic harmony and order: as the king is a reflection of the gods, so by his imitation and reflection of the harmony of the heavenly realm he procures order and stability on the earth.¹⁴⁰ So, for example, Diotogenes: “...the king is to bring the whole kingdom into harmony with his single rule and leadership;” the king is “overseer and fashioner of the organization of which he is the dictator.”¹⁴¹ As God/the gods were seen as “holding and shaping matter into the cosmos” so “that is what the king...had to do for his kingdom.”¹⁴² Plutarch, as we have seen, says “the ruler is the image of God *who orders all things*”(780e). That the king effects harmony for his kingdom and thereby establishes cosmic order is simply ubiquitous throughout ancient kingship texts.¹⁴³

We have seen above that praise of Augustus’ rule often centered upon his production of cosmic stability and order. To give two more examples, Augustus “restored stability, when everything was collapsing and falling into disarray, and gave a new look to the entire world.”¹⁴⁴ Philo refers to Augustus as “the Caesar who calmed the torrential storms on every side, who healed the pestilences common to

¹⁴⁰ E.g., see Diotogenes in Thesleff 72.19-23. Many of these texts have been discussed in chapter 2 (“The Law of Christ in Paul and the King as Living Law.”).

¹⁴¹ Erwin R. Goodenough, “The Political Philosophy of Hellenistic Kingship,” *Yale Classical Studies* 1 (1928), 55-102, here, 66-67.

¹⁴² Goodenough, “The Political Philosophy of Hellenistic Kingship,” 69.

¹⁴³ See also Musonius Rufus 64.10-15 [in Cora E Lutz, “M Rufus, ‘The Roman Socrates’,” *YCS* 10 (1947): 3-147].

¹⁴⁴ *Documents Illustrating the Reigns of Augustus and Tiberius* 98a, lines 4-9.

Greeks and barbarians...who led disorder into order and brought gentle manners and harmony to all unsociable and brutish nations” (*Embassy to Gaius*, 145-147). And finally, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* states “Jupiter controls the heights of heaven and the kingdom’s of the tri-formed universe; but the earth is under Augustus’ sway. Each is both father and ruler” (858-860).

The poets’ depictions of Augustus’ reign ushering in a period of cosmic fertility and abundance contribute to the notion of the cosmos’ dependence upon the king.¹⁴⁵ Paul’s assertion that all creation is “held together in him,” may be seen as shedding light on his own messianic use of agricultural images of abundance: “the gospel of truth (τῷ λόγῳ τῆς ἀληθείας τοῦ εὐαγγελίου) ... *is bearing fruit and increasing in the entire world* (ἐν παντὶ τῷ κόσμῳ ἐστὶν καρποφορούμενον καὶ αὐξανόμενον)” (1:5b-6a; cf. ἐν παντὶ ἔργῳ ἀγαθῷ καρποφοροῦντες καὶ αὐξανόμενοι τῇ ἐπιγνώσει τοῦ θεοῦ, 1:10b; Gen. 1:28).¹⁴⁶ Thus, the fertile increase and abundant growth of the gospel extend throughout the entire world as a result of Christ’s orderly reign (1:6).¹⁴⁷

c. *Christ the King Rules over his People and Establishes Cosmic Peace*

“he is the head of the body of the assembly” (1:18a)

¹⁴⁵ See above xx. See further xxx.

¹⁴⁶ The royal connotations of “gospel” are well-known, whether one emphasizes an Isaianic (see Isa. 40, 52, and 61) or a Roman imperial context. See N. T. Wright, “Paul’s Gospel and Caesar’s Empire,” in *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl* (ed. Richard A. Horsley; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 160-184, here, 164-165.

¹⁴⁷ Numerous interpreters have noted the echo of Gen. 1:28 in Col. 1:6, 10. Beetham, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letter to the Colossians*, 41-59; McDonough, *Christ as Creator*, 180-182. Fewer have seen its resonance with Roman imperial propaganda. See, however, Brian Walsh and Sylvia Keesmat, *Colossians Remixed*.

Paul's statement that Christ "is the head of the body – the assembly (αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος τῆς ἐκκλησίας, 1:18a)" portrays Christ as the heavenly enthroned ruler over his body politick much as Caesar was spoken of as the head of the empire. Paul's use of ἡ κεφαλὴ has spawned an enormous amount of literature, with some seeing connotations of authority and pre-eminence and others connotations of source and origin, but for my purposes it is enough to demonstrate how the metaphor of "the head" can be, and here is, language that stresses Christ's regal authority over his assembly.¹⁴⁸ And this should not be an entirely surprising claim given Greco-Roman moralists and orators consistently refer to the commonwealth or the empire as the body or body-politick.¹⁴⁹

First, though I have emphasized this point repeatedly, it is incumbent upon the interpreter to read Paul's metaphor within its own literary context before turning to other sources, and, as we have seen, that context is one replete with messianic, kingly metaphors: divine son-ship (1:13), the image of God (1:15a), the firstborn over all creation (v. 15b), and so forth.¹⁵⁰ Second, the regal nature of the

¹⁴⁸ My emphasis on the metaphor as royal does not exclude the helpfulness of ancient medical physiological understandings of "head" which often employed the metaphor of "head" to speak of it as both ruler and source of health. See Clinton E. Arnold, "Jesus Christ: 'Head of the Church' (Colossians and Ephesians)," in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology* (eds. Joel B. Green and Max Turner; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, xxxx), 346-366 on 1 Cor. 11:2-16. Fitzmyer, Payne, Scroggs, Grudem etc.

¹⁴⁹ See, for example, Plato, *Republic* 8.556e; Livy 2. 32.12-33.1; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. Rom.* 6.83.2; Aristotle, *Politics* 3.6.4; Dio Chrysostom, *Oration* 33.16; 34.10-20; Aelius Aristides, *Oration* 24.38-39. Also, see Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 38-47; and Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 157-164; Matthias Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft: Soziologie und Liturgie Frühchristlicher Mahlfeiern* (Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 1996), 308-315.

¹⁵⁰ Thus, a political and royal reading of the metaphor is inherently more likely than one a philosophical-cosmological reading (such as one finds in Plato's *Timaeus*) that sees the world as a

metaphor cannot be doubted in the parallel Eph. 1:20-23 where Paul refers to Christ as “head over all things with respect to the church” (κεφαλὴν ὑπὲρ πάντα τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ, 1:22b). Here the context is one where God, through raising the Messiah from the dead and “seating him at his right hand in the heavenly realm” (καθίσας ἐν δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις, 1:20; cf. LXX Ps. 109:1), places Christ “above every rule, authority, power, and lord” (ὑπεράνω πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας καὶ δυνάμεως καὶ κυριότητος, 1:21a). Through his royal enthronement of the Messiah, God “has placed all things underneath his feet” (πάντα ὑπέταξεν ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ, 1:22a; cf. LXX Ps. 8:7).¹⁵¹ Paul’s reliance upon the language of the royal Ps. 8 and Ps. 109 to speak of Christ as the heavenly κεφαλὴ makes it obvious that the metaphor stresses the King’s authority and rule over his body politick.¹⁵² The same is true for the metaphor in 2:10 where Paul speaks again of Christ as “the head over every rule and

cosmic body controlled by a ruling heavenly head. E.g., see Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 44-45; Schweizer, *The Letter to the Colossians*, 58-59; James D. G. Dunn, “The ‘Body’ in Colossians,” in *To Tell the Mystery: Essays on New Testament Eschatology in Honor of Robert H. Gundry* (JSNTSup; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 163-181, here, 173-175. This interpretation also has the major problem that Paul does not speak of “the body” as a cosmic body given his addition of the appositional genitive τῆς ἐκκλησίας which modifies τοῦ σώματος. See Arnold, “Jesus Christ,” 348-350. There is, then, no need to posit τῆς ἐκκλησίας as Pauline redaction to the original hymn.

¹⁵¹ Rightly noted by Dunne, “The Regal Status of Christ in the Colossian ‘Christ-Hymn,’” 14.

¹⁵² On the use of the Psalms in Ephesians 1:20-23, see Andrew T. Lincoln, “The Use of the OT in Ephesians,” *JSNT* 14 (1982): 16-57, here, 40-42. That Col. 2:10 and Eph. 1:20-23 use the term “head” in the sense of enthroned ruler is rightly recognized though the insight is not pressed with Col. 1:18 by Gottfried Nebe, “Christ, the Body of Christ and Cosmic Powers in Paul’s Letters and the New Testament as a Whole,” in *Politics and Theopolitics in the Bible and Postbiblical Literature* (eds. Henning Graf Reventlow et al; JSOTSup 171; Sheffield), 100-118, here, 114-116.

authority” (ἡ κεφαλὴ πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας) in a context that emphasizes these rulers’ subjection to Christ and those in Christ.¹⁵³

Third, though the Hebrew term for “ruler” (מֶלֶךְ) is not *usually* rendered by the Septuagint translators as κεφαλὴ, there are plenty of instances where its occurrence does have royal, pre-eminent connotations.¹⁵⁴ Most important is David’s hymn where he celebrates God’s “salvation for his king and steadfast love for his anointed” (μεγαλύνων σωτηρίας βασιλέως αὐτοῦ καὶ ποίων ἔλος τῷ χριστῷ αὐτοῦ, LXX 2 Sam. 22:51a); David sings: “you kept me as the head of the nations (φυλάξεις με εἰς κεφαλὴν ἐθνῶν); people whom I had not known served me” (22:44). Similarly, Philo says of Ptolemy II Philadelphus that “as the head takes the ruling part in a living body, so [the king] may be said to be head over the kings” (ἐν ζῳ τὸ ἡγεμονεῦον κεφαλὴ τρόπον τινὰ τῶν βασιλέων, *Life of Moses* II.30).

Fourth, Paul’s statement finds an obvious parallel with imperial panegyrists who exalt Caesar as head and ruler of his imperial body.¹⁵⁵ In his *De Clementia*, Seneca repeatedly refers to the young Nero as the “head” and “mind” over the body of the empire and as the one who stabilizes the empire and unites his people together: “the whole body (*corpus*) is the servant of the mind” and “the vast multitude of men surrounds one man as though he were its mind, ruled by his spirit, guided by his reason” (1.3.5); the emperor is “the bond by which the commonwealth

¹⁵³ So Arnold, “Jesus Christ,” 364-365.

¹⁵⁴ See, for example, Judges 10:18; 11:11; 1 Kgs. 20:12 (LXX) Isa. 7:8-9; 11:10-11; Jer. 38:7 (LXX).

¹⁵⁵ On the head as the *ruling* part of the body, see Plato, *Timaeus* 44d.

is united, the breath of life which these many thousands draw,” for the empire would be prey were the “mind of the empire to be withdrawn” (1.4.1); the emperor stabilizes the body politick, and for this reason “the commonwealth needs the head” (1.4.2-3); “the gentleness of your mind will be transmitted to others...it will be diffused over the whole body of the empire, and all will be formed in your likeness for health springs from the head (2.2.1).”¹⁵⁶ For Seneca, the function of the head (emperor)//body (empire) metaphor is to stress *the remarkable connection between the ruler and the ruled* such that Nero will care for and not harm his own body. Just as the “church” is the *body of the head* (Col. 1:18a), so Seneca speaks of “the commonwealth as though it were a part of himself” (i.e., the king; 1.13.4). It may be of relevance to note here that the king as “mind” and “head” has connotations of both *ruler and source of the body’s health* which illuminates Paul’s application of κεφαλή to Christ who both rules the church (Col. 1:18a; 2:10) and provides health and nourishment to the body (Col. 2:19). One can state the implications for Colossians 1:18 no better than Maier:

Like Nero, who imperial poets acclaimed as an embodied deity, and Seneca celebrated as the head of the body, the Roman empire, on whom all rests and depends for its health and vigour, the incarnate Son, the enthroned Jesus, heads the cosmos by which all things hold together (1.17) and from whom, in ‘empire of his beloved son’ (1.13), comes growth and renewal (2.9-10, 19; 1.6).¹⁵⁷

“he is the ruler/beginning” (Col. 1:18b)

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Harry Maier, “A Sly Civility: Colossians and Empire,” *JSNT* 27 (2005): 323-349, here, 335 n. 29. See also, Michelle V. Lee, *Paul, the Stoics, and the Body of Christ* (SNTSMS 37; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 35-39.

¹⁵⁷ Maier, “Sly Civility,” 338.

Paul's statement that Christ is the ἀρχή may either indicate that his is supreme in terms of rank and hence "ruler," or that he is supreme in temporal terms as "the beginning" of creation.¹⁵⁸ Both readings can find plausible justification within the hymn. Paul has just stressed Christ's pre-eminence and rule over creation in vv. 15b-17 where Christ has been depicted not only as ruler but even creator of all things, and in the next line Paul will celebrate Christ as *the first* to rise from the dead (1:18c). What needs to be appreciated, however, is that the semantic range of ἀρχή includes both temporal primacy ("beginning") and status/rank primacy ("ruler").¹⁵⁹ We have seen, for example, the Priene Letter refer to the birthday of Augustus as "equivalent to the beginning of all things (τῶν πάντων ἀρχῇ)" and "the beginning of the breath of life (ἀρχὴν τοῦ βίου καὶ τῆς ζωῆς)." For this reason, one finds applied to rulers to stress their pre-eminence – sometimes in terms of rank and status and sometimes in terms of source, origin, and temporal priority. Thus, each of the poetic praises placed at the seams of the LXX Pentateuch refer to the coming king as ἀρχή (Gen. 49:10; Num. 23:21; Deut. 33:5).¹⁶⁰ See, for example, the royal use of ἀρχή to refer to Israel's coming king in LXX Isa. 9:5-6a:

Because a child was born for us, a son was given to us, *whose sovereignty* (ἡ ἀρχή) was upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called 'messenger of great counsel,' for I will bring peace upon the

¹⁵⁸ Those who translate ἀρχή as "beginning" include: Dunn, O'Brien, Gordley, *The Colossian Hymn in Context*, 222. Those who see ἀρχή as referring to Christ's status as "ruler" include: Dunne, "The Regal Status of Christ in the Colossian 'Christ-Hymn,'" 15.

¹⁵⁹ So Clinton E. Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism: The Interface between Christianity and Folk Belief at Colossae* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 260-261.

¹⁶⁰ For other instances in the LXX where ἀρχή refers to a king or ruler, see LXX Deut. 17:20; Dan. 2:37; 7:27; Amos. 6:7.

rulers (τοὺς ἄρχοντας), peace and health to him. His sovereignty (ἡ ἀρχὴ αὐτοῦ) is great, and his peace has no boundary upon the throne of David and his kingdom.”

That ἀρχή can simultaneously emphasize temporal and status pre-eminence is also seen in the linkage between Israel’s firstborn son as temporally first (hence, “the beginning of my sons”) *and* as the ruler to whom the rights, privileges, and bulk of inheritance belongs (e.g., Gen. 49:3; Deut. 21:17; cf. above on Col. 1:15b). Thus, given Paul’s next statement refers to Christ as “the firstborn from the dead” (1:18c), one may justifiably conclude that as the resurrected and enthroned Messiah, Christ is both pre-eminent as *ruler and the beginning* of the resurrection from the dead.¹⁶¹

“the firstborn from the dead” (1:18c)

In Paul’s description of Christ as πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν I remind the reader that the messianic context of Col. 1:12ff strongly suggests an activation of LXX Ps. 88:26 as an echo where the royal Davidic “firstborn” is *promised* to be “exalted above the kings of the earth” (καγὼ πρωτότοκον θήσομαι αὐτόν, ὑψηλὸν παρὰ τοῖς βασιλεῦσιν τῆς γῆς).¹⁶² Here the Father’s enthronement of his royal firstborn will secure eternally *both his offspring and his throne* as the firstborn’s inheritance from his father (καὶ θήσομαι εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος τὸ σπέρμα αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸν θρόνον αὐτοῦ ὡς τὰς ἡμέρας τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, Ps. 88:30). Yet all of the promises made to the Davidic king in Ps. 88:20-38 are undone in verses 39-51 where the psalmist accuses the Father of renegeing on his promises and abandoning the Davidic King to death and

¹⁶¹ Cf. Rev. 1:5.

¹⁶² Note the repeated use of the future tense throughout Ps. 88:20-38.

defeat (vv. 39-44): “you have exalted the right hand of his foes” (v. 42a) and “you have cut short the days of his youth” (v. 45a).¹⁶³ Thus, the firstborn son promised enthronement over all the kings of the earth faces the situation of death and an end to his offspring. Thus, I suggest that for Paul it is the resurrection of the firstborn son from the realm of death that enables the Davidic son to take his rightful place as exalted and enthroned king and secures the continuing offspring of the Messiah.

The Father’s royal enthronement of his firstborn over “the kings of the earth” fits nicely with Paul’s description of Christ as “the head of every ruler and dominion” (ὅς ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας, Col. 2:10b).¹⁶⁴ And given the repeated association between the resurrection and enthronement of the Messiah found throughout the NT compositions (e.g., Acts 2:22-36; 13:33ff; Heb. 1:5-13) – an association made possible not least by the Psalter (e.g., Ps. 2:7 in Rom. 1:4; Pss 8 and 109 in 1 Cor. 15:23-28) – it seems likely that Paul speaks of Jesus as “firstborn from the dead” in order to refer to his messianic enthronement.¹⁶⁵ Thus, being “firstborn from the dead” results in the Davidic Messiah’s kingship over (new) creation, just as it does in Heb. 1:6 and Rev. 1:5.¹⁶⁶ But it is not only the exalted *throne* that the firstborn receives in his resurrection, but as the firstborn son he has the royal rights

¹⁶³ Hamilton, *The Body Royal*, 92-94.

¹⁶⁴ McDonough, *Christ as Creator*, 184, suggests that it is precisely this “messianic triumph over the nations [that has] been read back into the original creation and been given cosmic scope.”

¹⁶⁵ On the Messiah’s resurrection as royal enthronement in 1 Cor. 15:23-28, see N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 333-338; on Rom. 1:3-4, see Joshua W. Jipp, “Ancient, Modern, and Future Interpretations of Romans 1:3-4: Reception History and Biblical Interpretation,” *JTI* 3 (2009): 241-259.

¹⁶⁶ Though his discussion is with respect to the royal depiction of “the firstborn from the dead” who is “the ruler over the kings of the earth” in Rev. 1:5, see the comments by G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 335-336.

of primogeniture with respect to his church and, as the *first* to be raised from the dead, he thereby secures the resurrection of his offspring – thus fulfilling God’s promise to secure the anointed one’s offspring forever (Ps. 88:30; cf. 1 Cor. 15:20-23; Rom. 8:29).¹⁶⁷ The messianic king is the first one to experience resurrection, but his enthronement secures the certainty that his offspring will follow his path.¹⁶⁸

“in order that he might be first in all things” (1:18d)

Christ’s status as “firstborn from the dead” results in his preeminence over everything, hence the purpose clause, ἵνα γένηται ἐν πᾶσιν αὐτὸς πρωτεύων, interprets his title πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν and thereby further confirms it as a royal honorific. He is “firstborn from the dead” *so that* he might be pre-eminent over everything, or in other words, resurrection qualifies him to be the universal ruler of creation and new creation. The language of preeminence and first-ness is conventional for epideictic speeches, including hymns and prayers (especially to gods), and marked off heroic humans or gods as unique and their actions as unparalleled.¹⁶⁹ In the OT, in addition to YHWH, the kings of Israel are the ones who most frequently receive acclamations of uniqueness and incomparability: “no other king shall compare to you” (Solomon: 1 Kings 3:13; 10:23); “there was no one like

¹⁶⁷ Similarly, Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 307.

¹⁶⁸ See Lidija Novakovic, *Raised from the Dead According to Scripture: The Role of Israel’s Scripture in the Early Christian Interpretations of Jesus’ Resurrection* (Jewish and Christian Texts in Contexts and Related Studies Series; New York/London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 152-153.

¹⁶⁹ For example, Aristotle states: “...one should also use many kinds of amplification, for example if the subject is the only one, or the first (πρῶτος), or one of a few, or the one who most has done something” (*Rhetoric* 2.7.2). Cf. Quintilian, *Institutes* 3.7.16; Aelius Theon, *Progymnasmata*, 9.35-38. See further Jerome H. Neyrey, “ ‘First,’ ‘Only,’ One of a Few,’ and ‘No one else,’: The Rhetoric of Uniqueness and the Doxologies in 1 Timothy,” *Biblica* 86 (2005): 59-87.

him among the kings of Judah, either after him nor those who were before him” (Hezekiah: 2 Kings 18:5).¹⁷⁰

Thus, it is no surprise to find forms of πρωτευ- are often attached to prominent Romans seeking to establish themselves as first and unique. For example, in Plutarch’s *Life of Caesar* the general is presented in constant pursuit of first-ness, motivated by φιλότιμια. Plutarch notes that Caesar’s admirers tell him that everyone desires “to have him as first man (πρωτεύσειν)” (6.4). Caesar is reported to have said in response to “struggles for preeminence” (περὶ πρωτείων, 11.2) witnessed in a barbarian village: “I would rather be first here (εἶναι μᾶλλον πρῶτος) than second in Rome” (11.3). Above we saw Philo speak of Augustus as “the first and the greatest (πρῶτος καὶ μέγιστος), the common benefactor of all” (*Embassy to Gaius*, 149).

“because all the fullness was pleased to dwell in him” (1:19)

In v. 19 πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα is likely the subject of εὐδόκησεν...κατοικῆσαι and,¹⁷¹ I suggest, both explains why Christ has pre-eminence in everything (v. 18d) and gives the ground (ὅτι) for Christ’s reconciling work in v. 20: i.e., Christ the king can provide cosmic reconciliation precisely because God has invested him with “all the fullness.” Though the noun τὸ πλήρωμα is significant within Colossians and functions

¹⁷⁰ See Gary N. Knoppers, “‘There was None Like Him’: Incomparability in the Book of Kings,” *CBQ* 54 (1992): 411-431.

¹⁷¹ So O’Brien, 51; Schweizer, 66-67; Stanley E. Porter, *Καταλάσσω in Ancient Greek Literature, with Reference to the Pauline Writings* (Cordoba: Ediciones El Almendro), 172-174.

to associate both Christ and those in-Christ with God in the closest possible manner (1:9, 19, 25; 2:9-10; cf. Eph. 3:19), its precise function and religious context is difficult to determine. I simply offer the two following observations. First, the LXX frequently uses the language of τὸ πλήρωμα in contexts emphasizing God's dominion and authority over all of creation. To give just two examples: "the earth *and its fullness* (τὸ πλήρωμα αὐτῆς) is the Lord's, the world and all those who live in it" (LXX Ps. 23:1); and "to you are the heavens, and to you is the earth, the world and its fullness (τὸ πλήρωμα αὐτῆς) you founded" (LXX Ps. 88:12).¹⁷² We remember from discussions of LXX Ps. 88 that the Father gifts the royal Son with *his* dominion over creation. So to speak of Christ as embodying "all the fullness" of the Father marks him out as God's deputized agent who rules over the cosmos (Col. 1:20).¹⁷³

Second, if 1:19 functions, at least in part, as the ground for Paul's acclamation of Christ as the royal agent who accomplishes cosmic peace and reconciliation of *all things* (1:20), then it may be worthwhile to note that εὐδοκέω is frequently used in the LXX to describe God's election.¹⁷⁴ For example, 1 Macc. 14:41 narrates the Jews' "choice (εὐδόκησαν) of Simon to be their ruler and priest forever until a trustworthy prophet should arise." In Ps. 67:17 (LXX) God elects (εὐδόκησεν ὁ θεός) Zion as his

¹⁷² For more examples, see LXX Ps. 49:12; Jer. 23:24;

¹⁷³ Similarly, Susan Watts Henderson ["God's Fullness in Bodily Form: Christ and Church in Colossians," *ExT* 118 (2007): 169-173, here, 172] notes: "When the hymn speaks of 'all the fullness that dwells in him' (Col 1:19), the term confers upon Christ the full extent of authority over 'things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers' (Col 1:16)."

¹⁷⁴ Here I follow Michael Peppard, *The Son of God in the Roman World: Divine Sonship in Its Social and Political Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 106-112; cf. Collins, "The Worship of Jesus and the Imperial Cult," 249-251.

exalted mountain in opposition to all other mountains (cf. 2 Macc. 14:35). In LXX Ps. 151, the text speaks in the voice of David: “My brothers were handsome and tall, but the Lord *did not choose them*” (οὐκ εὐδόκησεν ἐν αὐτοῖς). God’s rescue of David is the result of God’s election of the king (ὅτι εὐδόκησεν ἐν ἐμοί, 2 Sam. 22:20). Thus, a plausible interpretation of Col. 1:19 would be one that stressed God’s election of the Messiah as his supreme vicegerent and God’s decision to share all of his divine fullness with his anointed one.¹⁷⁵ It is precisely the gods’ election of their imperial ruler *as well as* YHWH’s election of his Davidic king that lead to the most exalted claims on behalf of the king. As we have seen above, the election of David results in his receiving of worship (1 Chron. 29:16-26). Psalm 44 (LXX) refers to God’s anointed as *God* (v. 7). And Ps. 109 (LXX) depicts another royal agent *sharing YHWH’s throne* (vv. 1-3). We have also seen how Hellenistic ruler cults and Roman imperial cults spoke of the king as the elected, vice-gerent of the gods in whom all divine authority and power was invested.¹⁷⁶ Thus, the incredible claim that God elected to share all of his fullness ἐν αὐτῷ (the antecedent still τοῦ υἱοῦ τῆς ἀγάπης αὐτοῦ in 1:13b) naturally arises out of royal ideology.

“And through him to reconcile all things to himself, by making peace through the blood of his cross, whether the things on earth or the things in heaven” (1:20)

¹⁷⁵ Further support that Paul is using εὐδόκησεν to speak of God’s choice or election can be found in Eph. 1:4-5 where God’s “election (ἐξελέξατο) of us in him before the foundation of the world” and his “destining (προορίσας) us for adoption” takes place κατὰ τὴν εὐδοκίαν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ.

¹⁷⁶ For one more example, See the first lines of the speech placed by Seneca in Nero’s mouth in *De Clementia*: “Have I, of all mortals, found favor with the gods and been chosen to act on earth in their stead?” (1.1.2). See J. Rufus Fears, “Nero as the Vicegerent of the Gods in Seneca’s *De Clementia*,” *Hermes* 103 (1975): 486-96.

In 1:20 Paul celebrates God's accomplishment of reconciliation of all things to himself (ἀποκαταλλάξαι τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτόν) *through his royal vicegerent* (δι' αὐτοῦ).¹⁷⁷ We have seen that the rhetorical handbooks detailing how to praise kings suggest that emphasis should be placed upon the ruler's great deeds or benefactions for his people.¹⁷⁸ Here Paul finally draws attention to Christ's great work of accomplishing universal reconciliation by means of "making peace through the blood of the cross" (εἰρηνοποιήσας διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ). Paul again emphasizes that this reconciling peace is accomplished "through him" (δι' αὐτοῦ)¹⁷⁹, and is cosmic in scope for it encompasses "things on earth and things in heaven" (εἴτε τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς εἴτε τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς).

While there are a host of ancient royal virtues and traits of the good king, *the* single most significant component of a king's legitimacy was military victory, conquest and expansion, and pacification and defeat of one's enemies, which thereby resulted in peace and concord.¹⁸⁰ Arguably the single most important trait

¹⁷⁷ Given my understanding of πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα as the subject of the main verb in 1:19, it makes most sense to retain "God" as the subject of ἀποκαταλλάξαι who accomplishes reconciliation through the agency of his son (δι' αὐτοῦ).

¹⁷⁸ See Gordley, *The Colossian Hymn in Context*, 226-227, who notes the emphasis in 1:20 on Christ's benefactions for his people but does not draw the connection with praiseworthy kings and rulers.

¹⁷⁹ Text critical justification.

¹⁸⁰ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill ["The Emperor and his Virtues," *Historia* 30 (1981): 298-323] has demonstrated that there was no such established canon of royal virtues (as found on the shield presented to Augustus – *virtus, clementia, iustitia*, and *pietas*), but rather what demonstrates his legitimacy to rule is "the power to conquer, to save, to bring harmony and stability, and to distribute benefits" (p. 316). I am dependent here, in part, upon the fine essay by Philip de Souza ["*Parta Victoriis Pax*: Roman Emperors as Peacemakers," in *War and Peace in Ancient and Medieval History* (eds. Philip de Souza and John France; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 76-106, here, 76] states: "One of the most prominent political and cultural features of the ancient world is the extent to which the authority and power of rulers was directly derived from their success in war."

of the good king was this production of peace and harmony *through* defeat and pacification of the empire's enemies. J. Rufus Fears refers to this aspect of royal ideology as "the theology of victory": "Conquest and expansion of his kingdom's frontiers were the duty of the true king, and the gods of the commonwealth aided his martial enterprises, leading his armed host into battle."¹⁸¹ Peace through pacification or reconciliation of one's enemies was often situated in a cosmic context and spoken of as something that brought peace and harmony to the cosmos (or "land and sea") and was given as a gift of the gods.¹⁸² Thus, forms of καταλάσσω and διαλάσσω are frequently used in royal and/or diplomatic contexts to indicate a leader's reconciliation or pacification of enemies thereby resulting in peace and cosmic harmony.¹⁸³ Periander, for example, brings harmony between Mytilene and Athens through acting as a reconciler (x, Herodotus, *Histories* 5.95).¹⁸⁴ Plato says that the tyrant is always ready to make more wars "after he has begun to reconcile/pacify his enemies (πρὸς τοὺς ἔξω ἐχθροὺς τοῖς μὲν καταλλαγῇ)" (*Republic* 8.566E). Plutarch states of Alexander the Great's ideology of peace and harmony through pacification (*On the Fortune of Alexander* 329C):

But, as he believed that he came as a heaven-sent governor to all, and as a reconciler for the whole world (διαλλακτῆς τῶν ὅλων), those whom he could not persuade to unite with him, he conquered by force of arms, and he brought together into one body all men everywhere, uniting and mixing in one great loving-cup, as it were, men's lives, their characters, their marriages, their very habits of life.

¹⁸¹ Fears, *PRINCEPS A DIIS ELECTUS*, 45-46.

¹⁸² E.g., see Pliny, *Panegyricus*; Calpurnius Siculus, *Eclogue* 4.142-146.

¹⁸³ E.g., see Anthony Bash, *Ambassadors for Christ: An Exploration of Ambassadorial Language in the New Testament* (WUNT 2; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 29-32.

¹⁸⁴ See further, Herodotus, *Histories* 6.108.5; 7.154.3.

Pliny gives voice to the same Roman imperial ideology in his statement when he speaks of “the immeasurable majesty of the Roman peace” as a gift of the gods mediated through his emperors (*Natural History* 27.3).¹⁸⁵ And we saw Pliny celebrate Trajan precisely for the peace that the emperor is able to bring across land and sea for the sake of his subjects (*Panegyricus* 4.4; 5.6-9).

Military victory was both the source and the ground for the kingship of Alexander the Great and his Hellenistic successors and this played an enormous role in legitimating the rule of Julius Caesar and Augustus.¹⁸⁶ The author of 1 Maccabees begins his work by characterizing Alexander’s kingship as the result of his military exploits and conquests into new territories (1:3-9).¹⁸⁷ The first paragraphs of Augustus’ *Res Gestae* boast of his command of the army “by means of which I set the state free from the slavery imposed by the conspirators” (1.1).¹⁸⁸ Military exploits (2.1; 3.1; 21:1-3; 30.1), triumphs celebrating Augustus’ victories (ἐθριάμβευσα, 4.1), and the “making of peace on land and sea” (εἰρηνευομένης...πάσης γῆς τε καὶ θαλάσσης, 13.1; cf. θάλασσα[v] [εἰ]ρηνευσά-, 25.1; εἰρήνη κατέστησα, 26.2; θαλάσσης εἰρηνεύεσθαι πεπόηκα, 26.3) litter the list of his accomplishments.¹⁸⁹ Through Augustus’ ending of the civil war and his victories over foreign powers, “peace was

¹⁸⁵ De Souza, “*Parta Victoriis Pax*,” 98-99.

¹⁸⁶ For Alexander and his successors, see M. M. Austin, “Hellenistic Kings, War and the Economy,” *Classical Quarterly* 36 (1986): 450-466.

¹⁸⁷ See Anthea E. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 49-55.

¹⁸⁸ For text and translation, see Alison E. Cooley, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹⁸⁹ de Souza, “*Parta Victoriis Pax*,” 80-81.

been brought back again” and his entire reign can be characterized as “the pacification of the world through his victories” (Velleius Paterculus, *Roman History* 2.89).¹⁹⁰ Horace declares that with “Caesar as guardian of the state, neither civil discord nor violence shall drive away peace” (4.14.x). Even Epictetus speaks of Caesar as having “provided us with a great peace, so that there are no longer any wars or battles” (*Discourses*, 3.13.9). Tacitus, with critical irony, suggests that Augustus was able to increase his royal powers precisely through his provision of “the blandishments of peace” (*Ann.* 1.2).¹⁹¹ Cicero says that “peace with honor” (*cum dignitate otium*) is imperative for any who would lead the Romans (Cicero, *Sest.* 98). And we have seen above how Horace, Pliny, and Seneca celebrate the emperor as an agent of peace.¹⁹² Even Philo of Alexandria witnesses to the Roman royal theology of victory (*Embassy to Gaius* 145-147):

This is he who exterminated wars both of the open kind and of the covert which are brought about by the raids of brigands. This is he who cleared the sea of pirate ships and filled it with merchant vessels. This is he who reclaimed every state to liberty, who led disorder into order (ὁ τὴν ἀταξίαν εἰς τάξιν ἀγαγών) and brought gentle manners and harmony to all unsociable and brutish nations, who enlarged Hellas by many a new Hellas and Hellenized the outside world, in its most important regions – the guardian of peace (ὁ εἰρηνοφύλαξ).

Peace and harmony through pacification led to the poets’ consistent depiction of the emperors’ reign as resulting in fertility and abundance, that is, as

¹⁹⁰ See de Souza, “*Parva Victoriis Pax*,” 82-83.

¹⁹¹ See Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, 187. See also Tacitus’ scathing critique of imperial ‘peace’: “They ransack the world, and afterwards, when all the land has been laid waste by their pillaging, they scour the sea....They plunder, they murder, they rape, in the name of their so-called empire. And where they have made a dessert, they call it peace” (*Agr.* 30).

¹⁹² See above pp. xx-xx. With particular attention to Neronian imperial iconography, see Maier, “Sly Civility,” 329-340.

symbolizing the “divinely ordained product of the natural order of the universe.”¹⁹³ The ruler’s kingship was celebrated and legitimized through royal iconography. For example, as an honor for his pacification of Spain and Gaul, a military expedition that lasted over three years, “the senate decreed that an altar of the Augustan Peace should be consecrated next to the Campus Martius in honor of my [Augustus’] return” (*Res Gestae* 12.2). The *Ara Pacis* is related to the decision to shut the gates of the Temple of Janus, a symbolic act celebrating peace and the absence of war, and thereby the altar is “linked with the concept that peace is the result of military victories which secure the *imperium Romanum* on land and sea.”¹⁹⁴ Similarly, the Sebasteion in Aphrodisias celebrates peace through pacification as it personifies foreign nations as subjugated women underneath the rule of the Roman emperor.¹⁹⁵

Thus, the statement that Christ has produced cosmic harmony (“the things on earth and the things in heaven”) through his act of reconciling “all things” and bringing peace is of one accord with ancient royal notions of a theology of victory.¹⁹⁶ That Paul portrays Christ according to this piece of kingship ideology is confirmed by Paul’s fuller depiction of Christ’s pacification of the “rulers and authorities” in Col. 2:15. Christ, like a Roman general or emperor, first pacifies his enemies by “stripping” (ἀπεκδυσάμενος) them of their authority and then celebrates a triumph

¹⁹³ J. Rufus Fears, “The Theology of Victory,” *ANRW* 2.17.2 (1981): 736-826, here, 810.

¹⁹⁴ Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 141.

¹⁹⁵ See Laura Salah Nasrallah, *Christian Responses to Roman Art and Architecture: The Second-Century Church Amid the Spaces of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 76-83; Stefan Weinstock, “Pax and the ‘Ara Pacis,’” *JRS* 50 (1960): 44-58; Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 141-164.

¹⁹⁶ This point is established convincingly and in detail by Maier, “Sly Civility,” 329-340.

over the rebellious rulers (θριαμβεύσας αὐτούς).¹⁹⁷ The celebration of a triumph was a hotly pursued honor by generals and emperors, and it is well documented those victors who celebrated the triumph were seen as receiving divine honors and in some manner a manifestation of Jupiter (e.g., Livy 10.7.10; 5.23.25; Suetonius, *Augustus* 94; Pliny, *Natural History* 33.111; 35.157; Plutarch, *Camillus* 7).¹⁹⁸ Again, powerful benefactions elicited divine honors, and so by portraying Christ as celebrating a triumph for his mighty victory over the powers Paul indicates that Christ the King is worthy of receiving divine glory. This imperial pacification of the rebellious rulers (2:15) is, in fact, presupposed by the celebration of the cosmic harmony in the hymn (1:20).¹⁹⁹ All of creation, then, is a state of cosmic peace and harmony through the work of God's king who has pacified every rebellious authority. That the harmony on earth now mimics and matches the heavenly harmony of God through the elected king's pacification of the rebels is an imperial commonplace (see throughout). What, of course, cannot be paralleled in any ancient

¹⁹⁷ That the participles should be read sequentially rather than synonymously, see Scott J. Hafemann, *Suffering and the Spirit: An Exegetical Study of 2 Corinthians 2:14-3:3 within the Context of the Corinthian Correspondence* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1986), 33-34. On the Roman triumph, see Mary Beard, *The Roman Triumph* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007). On Paul's use of in 2:15 as metaphorically employing the ritual of the Roman triumph, see Lamar Williamson, "Led in Triumph," *Int* 22 (1968): 317-332; Roy Yates, "Colossians 2.15: Christ Triumphant," *NTS* 37 (1991): 573-591; Wesley Carr, *Angels and Principalities: The Background, Meaning and Development of the Pauline Phrase *hai archai hai hai exousiai** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 47-86.

¹⁹⁸ Roman scholars are not in full agreement, but Mary Beard [*The Roman Triumph*, 233-234] notes: "...what we do know is that there were strong links between the triumphing general and those contested ideas of deity and deification that were so high on the cultural and political agenda of the late Republic and early Empire Human success and its accompanying glory could push a mortal toward and even across the permeable boundary which, for the Romans, separated men from gods. ... Nonetheless, divine power and status were a measure against which to judge its human equivalents, and a potential goal and ambition for the super-successful." Also, see H. S. Versnel, *Triumphus: An Inquiry into the Origin, Development and Meaning of the Roman Triumph* (1970), 1: "In no other Roman ceremony do god and man approach each other as closely as they do in the triumph."

¹⁹⁹ Maier, "Sly Civility," 332.

kingship document is the means whereby Christ enacted this pacification – “through the blood of his cross” (διὰ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ, 1:20; cf. ἐν αὐτῷ, 2:15). The royal victory and conquest of the evil powers occurs, then, not through violent wars but through the king’s own suffering unto death. Through the blood of the cross, Christ extends his peaceful dominion over the entire cosmos.

III. The Development of Pauline Christology and Sharing in the Rule of the King

If my argument is broadly correct, that Paul constructs in Col. 1:15 a ὁ βασιλικὸς λόγος that uses the linguistic resources of both Jewish-Davidic and Hellenistic Kingship ideology, then at least two significant conclusions follow, one historical and related to the development of early Christian christology, and the other literary and indicating the rhetorical function of Paul’s royal Christ-hymn.

a. Pauline Christology and Ancient Kingship Ideology

The historical implication of my investigation suggests that ancient reflections upon the king played a significant role in Paul’s affirmation of the deity of Christ. In Paul’s christology there is an incredible overlap between the identities, titles, and functions of God and Jesus.²⁰⁰ The frequent assimilation of kings and emperors to gods in the ruler/emperor cults which allowed them to receive divine honors and worship, including hymns and encomia, is remarkably similar to what we find in Col. 1:15 – 20 – a royal hymn celebrating Christ the king as the vicegerent of God who creates and rules the cosmos and restores the cosmos to a state of peace.

²⁰⁰ E.g., see Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 79-153; Bauckham.

The claims that Christ is the creator of all things (1:16), temporally before all things (1:17a), was chosen to have all the divine fullness dwell within him (1:19), and the agent who has produced cosmic peace and harmony (1:20) are, indeed, remarkable, complicated, and cannot be accounted for by simply pointing toward one religious context or background. Yet these incredible claims about Jesus of Nazareth are explicable within the royal notions of the king as the one who shares the throne of God (LXX Psalms 44:7; 109:1-3), is a son of God (Psalm 2:6-8) or son of Zeus (Isocrates, *Evagoras* 13-14, 72; Callimachus *Hymn to Zeus* 69-79; Theocritus, *Idyll* 17.1-4), elected by God to stabilize and rule earth on his behalf (LXX Psalms 71:8-11; 88:25-30; Horace, *Carmen Saeculare*; Pliny, *Panegyricus* 4.4-9; 5.6; 80.3), the giver of god-like benefactions of peace and harmony (Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 6.253C; Plutarch, *Lysander* 18.2-4; Augustus, *Res Gestae*, 1; Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 149-151; Horace, *Ode*, 4.5.33-36), the gods' victorious general who subjugates rebellious enemies (Appian, *Civil War* 2.146; Horace, *Ode* 4.15.5-10), and is worthy of receiving divine honors and worship such as acclamations, hymns and encomia (Plutarch, *Lysander*, 18.2-4; LXX Genesis 49:8-12; Numbers 23:21; 1 Chron. 29:20, 25; Psalm 44). The practice of praising and hymning kings, giving them divine honors for divine benefactions, provides a window into the development of the earliest Christian christology. To state it baldly – the journey to Nicaea must traverse through kingship discourse.

b. Participating in the Rule of the King: The Rhetorical Function of Col. 1:15-20

Important as the religious context and ideas of Colossians 1:15-20 is, a convincing interpretation of the hymn must also indicate its rhetorical function, i.e., what work

does the royal hymn do in terms of persuading the Colossians to pursue a certain course of action? Many interpreters have rightly recognized that throughout the rest of the epistle Paul draws upon the claims of the Christ-hymn in order to construct a specific worldview or symbolic universe for the audience to inhabit,²⁰¹ and one which counters any fascination with lesser powers and authorities (e.g., 2:6-8, 16-23).²⁰² And this insight seems undeniable and even supported by Paul's command to have "the speech about the Messiah" (ὁ λόγος τοῦ Χριστοῦ) dwell within them (ἐνοικεῖτω ἐν ὑμῖν) *by means of* teaching and instructing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (3:16). Given that Paul has echoed the Christ-hymn throughout the epistle, it seems highly plausible that in 3:16 he exhorts the Colossians to sing the royal encomium, an act that thereby functions to socialize them into a symbolic universe where Christ the King reigns supremely as creator, ruler, and restorer of the entire cosmos. This socialization into this symbolic worldview where Christ the King reigns supreme will make any concern with other spiritual powers or addition of ritual and practice entirely unnecessary.

But given the incredibly close relationship between ruler and ruled, that is between king and body/commonwealth, Paul presents the Colossians *as sharing in each aspect of Christ the King's rule*.²⁰³ I suggest that the enormous amount of

²⁰¹ E.g., Walter T. Wilson, *The Hope of Glory: Education and Exhortation in the Epistle to the Colossians* (NovTSup 88; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 183-218; Wayne A. Meeks, " 'To Walk Worthily of the Lord': Moral Formation in the Pauline School Exemplified by the Letter to the Colossians," 37-58, esp. 42-43; Fowl, *The Story of Christ in the Ethics of Paul*, 123-154; Gordley, *Teaching through Song in Antiquity*.

²⁰² Short note on Colossian situation. I. Smith; C. Arnold.

²⁰³ We have seen the intimate relationship that exists between king and his subjects above in Seneca's deployment of the head/mind – body metaphor, in acclamations of Augustus as the empires' "breath of life" and "the beginning of all things", and the Psalmist's association between the king and the welfare of the people (e.g., LXX Psalms 71 and 88).

language that speaks of the church as participating “in Christ” is Paul’s shorthand for depicting the Colossians’ share in the reign and rule of Christ the King. Thus, the good king exists for the sake of the good and well-being of the people, and so there are obvious ecclesiological implications that derive from Paul’s kingship christology. For the sake of brevity, I simply list the relationship between the identity or activity of the King and his subjects in order to draw attention to the Colossians’ participation in the King’s reign.

1:15a – As Christ is “the image of the invisible God” (1:15a), so is the new humanity in the process of being renewed “according to the image of the one creating [the new humanity] (κατ’ εἰκόνα τοῦ κτίσαντος αὐτόν, 3:10b). As the royal Adam shares his image, through procreation, with his descendants, so Christ gives his image to his new humanity.²⁰⁴

1:15b – As the Davidic firstborn king who is exalted above all the other kings of the earth (LXX Psalm 88:26-28), so do the Colossians share in Christ’s royal exaltation as they have been raised above “where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God” (ὁ Χριστός ἐστὶν ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ θεοῦ καθήμενος, 3:1b; cf. LXX Psalm 109:1).

1:16 – Since Christ is the creator of everything in heaven and on the earth, “he is the head over every ruler and dominion” (ὅς ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας, 2:10b). Thus, by virtue of their participation in Christ

²⁰⁴ Clines; Poetics of Adam JBL.

(“you are being filled in him,” 2:10a), the Colossians share in Christ’s victory over the rebellious cosmic powers (cf. 2:14-15).

1:17 – Since Christ unifies and stabilizes “all things” (τὰ πάντα, 1:17) and “is all things and in all people” (ἀλλὰ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν Χριστός, 3:11b), this provides the foundation for a unified new humanity that is not divided by ethnic, socio-economic, or religious distinctions (3:10-11).

1:18a – The “head of the body,” that is Christ the King’s reign over his subjects, rules not for his benefit but for the nourishment, growth, and good of his body (2:19).

1:18b – As “firstborn from the dead” those who are in Christ (ἐν ᾧ) share now in the King’s resurrection (συνηγέρθητε, 2:12; συνηγέρθητε τῷ Χριστῷ, 3:1) and look forward to their “manifestation with him in glory” (σὺν αὐτῷ φανερωθήσεσθε ἐν δόξῃ, 3:4b).

1:19 – Just as “all the fullness chose to dwell in him,” so the subjects of the king participate in the life of God as Paul makes the remarkable claim that “you are being filled up in him” (ἐστὲ ἐν αὐτῷ πεπληρωμένοι, 2:10a) where the prepositional phrase refers to the one in whom “all the fullness of deity dwells bodily” (κατοικεῖ πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος, 2:9). Further, if it is correct that the language of εὐδόκησεν...κατοικῆσαι refers to God electing Christ as his royal vicegerent, then this may function as the basis for God’s electing and choosing the Colossians as his people (1:12; 3:12; 3:15b).

1:20 – The Colossians comprise those “who were formerly alienated and enemies” (1:21) in need of God’s reconciliation through the self-giving death of the King (1:22). As a result of Christ’s “making peace” and producing cosmic harmony (1:20), the Colossians can share in the peace of the Messiah (ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ Χριστοῦ βραβεύετω ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν, 3:15a).

Thus, the encomium to Christ the King functions as the means whereby Paul socializes the church into a realm where Christ is supreme over every competitor. By singing “the word about the Messiah” and by reflecting upon their own participation in every aspect of the beneficent King, the church is thereby grounded into a reality that makes all competitors of Christ’s rule simply irrelevant.