

πρωτοτοκος in Colossians 1:15-20: A Literary and Socio-Religious Inquiry into the Meaning and Significance for Christology.

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Abstract

Does ‘πρωτοτοκος’ (firstborn) in Col 1:15, 18 implies that Christ *was before all* creation, or *the first among all* creatures? The question is further complicated by the presence of πα,shj kti,sewj (of all creation), which could be read as *genitivum partitivus* or *genitivum comparationis*. Consequently, the study investigates the original meaning of the concept. Literary and social scientific approaches are adopted as the investigative tools, bearing in mind that the text does not serve as a proof text of Christ nature but only a stress of his *pre-eminence* over all creation.

Keyword: Firstborn, Only Son, Sovereignty, Colossians, New Testament Hymn, New Religious Movements

1. Introduction

The presentation of Christ in the Letter (to the Colossians) is rich and enigmatic.ⁱ The understanding and interpretation of the texts is problematic and challenging. Agreements and disagreements abound among Christians and their counterparts over the meaning of Christ’s events, especially within the context of the letter. Various opinions, sometimes contradictory, are held among Christians of the same and different confessions. One of the troubled concepts is “Christ as the firstborn of all creation.” Thus, the question often asked is whether the meaning of ‘πρωτο,τοκοj’ (firstborn) in Col 1:15, 18 implies that Christ *was before all* creation,ⁱⁱ or *the first among all* creaturesⁱⁱⁱ? As Hockel observes:^{iv} the difficulty connected with the concept (πρωτο,τοκοj) is the presence of πα,shj kti,sewj, which could be read as *genitivum partitivus* or *genitivum comparationis* (cf. Jn 1:15, 30; 15:18). The former places Christ within the sphere of creature, while the latter lays its emphasis on the prefix ‘πρω,το(j)’, in the sense of *prior* or *prius*.^v In

other words, the issue for most exegetes is not primarily on the cosmic and redemptive role of Christ in the salvific history as such. It is more on Christ's (pre-)existence^{vi} that eventually gives birth to the doctrine of the two-in-one nature. That is to say, "the pre-existent one is also the incarnate one and who yet at the same time bears the whole divine being in himself."^{vii} Hence it becomes imperative for biblical scholars, especially exegetes to revisit the issue, and probably rediscover the meaning of the concept (prwto,tokoj) within its proper context(s). The significance of the project is equally marked by the unique interest biblical scholars and theologians have demonstrated their respective and collective efforts to determine the exact meaning of the phrase prwto,tokoj pa,shj kti,sewj (first born of all creation 1:15b), which has generated various interpretations and volumes. In addition, the challenge and difficulty to come to a consensus on the definitive meaning of "prwto,tokoj" has invariably generated a lot of controversies, which are evident in the long history of the Church. It has as well exerted enormous doctrinal influence on the Church in defence of the faith against early Christian heresies, hence most of the subsequent pronouncements of the Church and the Councils would revolve around the idea of the prwto,tokoj.

The study is a biblical exegetical inquiry into the meaning of the concept prwto,tokoj (15b, 20) within the context of Col 1:15-20. Its purpose is Christological. It demonstrates the close relationship between doctrine and scripture, and how one can directly or indirectly influence the understanding of the other. The methodology of the study is literary and socio-religious with the aim of regenerating the spirit of inquiry in the New Testament scholarship, especially with concepts associated with NT Christology in general in order to determine their meanings within their individual contexts. Consequently, the understanding of Christ as the prwto,tokoj is taken up within the literary and theological world of Colossians. Thus, after arguing for the adoption of the Greek prwto,tokoj as a cognate of the English "firstborn," the study examines the notion of firstborn in the Old Testament as a necessary step to understand its significance in the NT. Some of the NT allusions to the concept are observed, thus followed by a brief discussion on the socio-religious background of Colossians and the Sitz im Leben of the Hymn. The text is then considered as a defence against Colossian heresy, and consequently, the study will

stress the theological import of the *prwto,tokoj* motif in its original context.

2. The Notion of *prwto,tokoj* in Secular Literature

The closest word in English that could translate *prwto,tokoj* is ‘firstborn’. The term, *be it rwkb* (Hebrew) or *prwto,tokoj* (Greek), is rarely used in most of the ancient scripts outside the Judeo-Christian scriptures. However, the oldest possible documentation of the word is around 5 B.C., which appears in Greek form. It is expressed in the passive sense as a reference to human beings. Thus a discovery of an inscription on a Jewish tomb from Tell el-Yehudieh (Leontopolis) reads: *wvdei/ni de. Moi/ra prwtoto,kou me te,knou pro.j te,loj h-gte bi,ou* (In the labours of the birth of my firstborn child fate led me to the end of life).^{viii} The literary surprise of the inscription is the presence of *prwto,tokoj*. One could have expected in the distich *prwto,gonoj*, which is the literary vogue of the epoch. Whether one interprets this as an influence from the LXX, the interest of most exegetes is chiefly on the exact meaning of the *prwto,tokoj*. Can *prwto,tokoj* in the context be understood as a synonym of *monogenh,j*?^{ix} The answer to the question is very pertinent since the identity of the child, who ‘caused’ the death of Arsinoe, as found in the inscription on the Jewish tomb, is not only the first but also the only issue of Arsinoe. So, the emphasis is not on the status of the child as *monogenh,j*, but *prwto,tokoj*, which is understood in terms of a historical chronological priority. That is to say that the child is called *prwto,kon te,knon* not in virtue of being the only child, which of course he is, but his being the first child that opens the womb.^x The same term can further be represented in the sense of privilege, that is, the ‘first in rank’,^{xi} irrespective of the child’s birthright as the firstborn that opens the womb. This extended notion of *firstborn* is closer to the *prwto,gonoj* of the Homeric time. This secondary meaning is a later development in history and often assumes the passive form.^{xii} Therefore, *prwto,tokoj* connotes ‘birthright’, that is, being the first to open the womb,^{xiii} and also privilege, that is, in the sense of being special among a class.^{xiv}

3. Firstborn in the Old Testament World

Unlike the accounts in secular literature, *prwto,tokoj* as one of the terms used to designate the ‘firstborn’ is inconsistently dominant in the OT religious world. It is generally associated with the Hebrew *rwkb*

(hrwkb, hrykb) as expressed in the MT,^{xv} and which, in its 130 occurrences in LXX,^{xvi} is translated, outside Deut 25:6 (paidi,on) and Job 1:13, 18 (presbu,teroj) as prwto,tokoj. That is to say that the Hebrew word that designates the firstborn could also mean a ‘child’ or an ‘elder’. Then, rwkb as a general term is associated with the ‘firstborn’. It refers to the male human beings and the firstlings of animals. In a more technical term, though less frequent, it refers to ‘all that opens the womb’. br (Gen 25:23) or ynIAa tyviarE (Gen 49:3) is sometimes applied to qualify the same reality (firstborn). The denominative rkb (pi‘el) can also be used (Deut 21:16)^{xvii}.

The reference to the ‘firstborn’ of animal is always that of the mother. But rwkb in terms of the human person can be either of the mother or the father, or even used in a metaphoric sense (cf. Ex 4:22). To stress the ‘*firstborn of the mother*’ could possibly imply some perspectival emphasis:

- (i) the sanctity of the child (Ex 34:19),
- (ii) the principle of specification, that the child is not his father’s firstborn but mother (I Chr 2:50) and
- (iii) the mother’s status at the time of the birth (Deut 25:6; cf. Jos Life 76; Lk 2:7).^{xviii}

Otherwise, the term is understood referring to the firstborn of the father.

The Greek Prwto,tokoj, understood as an expression of the “*first production*” is further found in the LXX as prwtoge,nnhma, thus stressing God’s special rights of ownership over every firstborn, which should be sanctified to him (Ex 22:29b-30 E; 34:19-20 J; cf. 13:1-2; Deut 15:19ff.), as Head of the Tribe or Giver of Fertility or even as Lord (l(b) of the Land (cf. Pss. 24:1; 50:10, 12), with the possibility of redemption (Num 18:15ff).^{xix} Of course, in tracing the Greek prwto,tokoj back to the Hebrew rwkb one discovers other meanings outside the concept of ‘giving birth’. They include the idea of ‘earlier’ or ‘older’, ‘head,’ ‘principal’ or ‘chief’, ‘one’, ‘first’. But more interesting for us is the unprecedented linguistic shift as a result of some socio-linguistic factors. Thus, the ‘original’ ideas of prwto,tokoj would change from the main components of prw,tokoj (first) and to,kokoj (child). The term now represents a notion of a thing that is ‘*first*’ and at the same time the ‘*only one*’, without any sense of comparison *with other things of the same kind* (cf. Ex 4:22; Sir 36:11).^{xx} In Ex 4:22, for example, the expression ui‘o,j prwto,toko/j mou `Israh,l (Israel my first

son) signifies the unique relationship between Israel and Yahweh in a very restrictive sense, such that it becomes impossible to place Israel in comparison with any other nation. It is this sense that the OT knows God as Israel's 'Father' (cf. Jer 31:9).

Ps 88:28 LXX speaks similarly of the (messianic) king. It is not the relationship between the king as *prwto,tokoj* and the 'kings of the earth' that stands in the foreground. It is the king's relationship with God, whose elected and beloved he is. He is the seed of David, the highest of kings (Ps 89:27). This is not in the sense of *primus inter pares*,^{xxi} for he does not stand in antithesis to the kings of the earth. He is simply above the kings of the earth.

The accent given to the 'unique' nature of the king in the context of being the *prwto,tokoj* is further stressed in *Pss Sol*, thus *ui`o.j avgaph,ttoj* and *prwto,tokoj* (13:9) and *ui`o.j prwto,tokoj* (first son) and *monogenh,j* (only son) are placed in parallel (18:49). They establish a literary apposition or a form of semantic equation of the firstborn with the *only begotten* and *beloved*, which could be interpreted from the background of the theology of the divine election, and possibly based on the assumption of the unique position of the *prwto,tokoj*. In such a figurative or metaphoric sense one observes the term assuming a slight change in meaning. It is now more of a 'special quality' or 'strength', the first of a thing being the strongest (cf. Job 18:13, Is 14:30), and sometimes the only one.

From the analysis, the Hebrew mind understands the 'firstborn' and the 'only son' as one and the same reality, a thought quite foreign not only to the Greek (not Hellenistic) but also to the western minds. It is a relationship of a special kind. It connotes affection, honour, authority and sovereignty. It refers to the preferential *heir* and without the possibility of a second of the same kind.

The ancient Semitics understand the firstborn as a property of the deity, which, of course, adds sanctity,^{xxii} preciousness, authority, sovereignty, responsibility, and right of succession to his preferential status. The firstborn is the most appropriate and worthy victim for the highest sacrifice to appease the deity or Yahweh and at the same time such sacrifice could assure the family or society special favour. It may be very interesting to examine the idea of sanctity and status as applied to the firstborn.

4. *The NT Allusions to prwto,tokoj*

The less frequent occurrence of prwto,tokoj in the NT is equally evident. The lexeme occurs only 8x in both in singular (Lk 2:7; Rom 8:29; Col 1:15, 18; Heb 1:6; Rev 1:5) and plural (Heb 11:28 [ta. prwto,toka of the Israelites]; 12:23 [evkklhsi,a prwtoto,kwn referring to Christians]) forms, and with different meanings. The singular form has Jesus always as the referent. With the exception of Lk 2:7 where it appears in the adjective form and with an unequivocal meaning of 'a natural process of birth', it is always in the substantive and understood in a metaphoric sense.^{xxiii} Although Luke's emphasis might have been on the virginity in relation to the to,koj, there is also the possibility of understanding the prefix in the context of Ex. 13:2 or 13:12. Of course, whether Jesus is dedicated to God, because the first-born is always God's (Ex 13:2), or, because of God's decree (Ex 13:12, Lk 2:23), the point of departure is the dedication of Jesus to God and his characterization as the messianic heir (cf. Lk 1:32f).^{xxiv} Jesus is simply the prwto,tokoj of Mary. The expression neither affirms nor denies Jesus being the *only* son of Mary. In other words, Jesus as o` monogenh,j of either the father or Mary cannot be completely affirmed only from the passage. Prwto,tokoj is not an absolute synonym of monogenh,j.^{xxv} Between the two terms, there lies some permissible difference.^{xxvi}

The allusion to prwto,tokoj in the Pauline and other NT passages convey different meanings, which are partly influenced not only by the OT understandings, but also the rabbinic and the Judeo-Hellenistic writings. However, the primary interest of the study is on the meaning of the term within the Colossian controversy. The choice of Colossians is not accidental. It goes back to the contemporary Christological crisis mostly associated with the upsurge of new 'religious movements,' whose identities and doctrinal perceptions are often amorphous. Their tenets are more or less a mixture of Christianity, mystery and traditional religions. That most of these groups have won a lot of admiration is incontestable. A part of the success is the fundamental belief of humankind in spiritual forces for solutions of most problems surrounding life and existence.

5. *prwto,tokoj in Colossians*

The first literary surprise is the double emergence of prwto,tokoj in the short hymn (1:15-20), while the term remains one of the less occurring

lexemes in the NT. Another astonishment is the strategic insertion of the word in the hymn. Thus, the word appears in each of the two stanzas of the hymn. It serves for literary aestheticism and theology. However, the significance of the term extends beyond the hymn to influence many other pastoral letters. Consequently, arriving at a more profound meaning of the concept may warrant a briefly discussion on the socio-religious background of the letter, with special emphasis on the hymn.

Colossae is a city within Asia Minor. It is located on an important commercial route passing through the Phrygian mountains connected to Ephesus on the Western Coast of Asia Minor to Iconium and Tarsus in the South East.^{xxvii} It is in the upper valley of the Lycus River, about 110 miles East of Ephesus. It is an important city of late antiquity^{xxviii} with a famous flourishing wool and textile industry.^{xxix} It comprises of the native Phrygians, Greeks, and a sizable community of Jews,^{xxx} with Gentiles' dominance of the Christian community (cf. 1:21, 27; 2:13).^{xxxi}

The city is also a famous bar of cultural illusion and a fertile ground for religious syncretism, which manifests itself in the intermingling of Jewish and Hellenistic elements to produce erroneous idea of Christianity, which incorporates some features of Judaism, Paganism, Christianity, magic, astrology and mystery religion forms.^{xxxii}

In the midst of such religious syncretism, the author of the letter is challenged with liturgical and doctrinal problems of the erroneous teachings; a "philosophy" (2:8). The teachings resort to some special tradition (2:8, 22), which include the observance of food regulations and festivals such as the new moons and the Sabbath (2:14, 16, 20, 21), and above all, the inducement for strict ascetic practices. The teachings appeal also to "elemental spirits of the universe" (2:8), which are probably identified with the "principalities and powers" (1:16; 2:19, 15) or as angelic beings. They collectively contribute to the 'fullness' of God and exercise certain demonic control over people's lives.

Human freedom is also considered as an important aspect of the teachings. Thus freedom is gained or regained by controlling the forces of fates and powers, to which homage must be paid (2:18).^{xxxiii} In other words, the central issue in Colossians is not the acquisition of knowledge of the divine or how to attain a deeper experience of the fullness of God. It is simply the practical issues of life. It is the fear of the astral power, the chthonic spirits, and the underworld powers. So,

with their folk religious roots, which provide some belief structure compatible with Christianity, the invocation of intermediary spirits and angels for protection becomes an unavoidable temptation. In short, the practice demeans the cosmic and soteriological role of Christ as the mediator between creation and the creator. It is an implicit indictment against the sufficiency of Christ by the Colossian Christians: the power and authority of Christ, and their access to his power and authority is no longer adequate to their daily life for protection from the hostile “powers”.^{xxxiv} Hence the letter is written to bolster the faith of the community (1:3-14; 2:2-3) and at the same time correct the erroneous teachings (2:4,8,16,18-20).^{xxxv}

The general information about the letter to the Colossians is presumed to dispose the reader for a better understanding of the exact meaning and function of the term *prwto, tokoj* within the hymn and in the wider context of the text world. The hymn is divided into two parts (vv.15-18a and 18b-20), consisting of different traditions. The first part, which majority of scholars considers as pre-Christian,^{xxxvi} is thanks to the Jewish wisdom motifs,^{xxxvii} the OT (esp. Gen 1 and Isa 40-55) and the *so, fia* (the Hellenistic-Jewish ideas).^{xxxviii} The second part is more of the Christian liturgical tradition and the Pauline theological ideas. The two parts form a complex compendium of the Christian Christological understanding of the mediatory role of Christ. It serves also as a polemic attack against the magical ‘wisdom Christology’ in which Jesus is seen on par with angels. The implication is then to consider the hymn as pre-Pauline,^{xxxix} though Christian and perhaps in circulation in Asia Minor.^{xl}

It is the liturgic-hymnic style of the hymn, plus its Christological quality that brings out the beauty of the entire passage. The Christology presents Jesus as “the image of the invisible God (1:15; cf. 2 Cor. 4:4), the first-born of all creation (1:15; cf. Rom 8:29), before all things (1:17), the beginning (1:18), the firstborn from the death (1:18); the one in whom, through whom, and for whom all things were created (1:16), the one in whom the fullness dwells (1:19; Eph. 3:19), the one through whom all things are reconciled (1:20; cf. Rom 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:18-19), the head of the body, the church (1:18; cf. Eph. 1:22; 4:15; 5:23).”^{xli} In other words, Jesus is the chief character of the hymn. He is addressed in the third person and without any direct reference to his name.

The hymn also betrays the widespread feeling of fear and insecurity about the instability of the world in the Mediterranean region. There is a strong belief of conflict between the physical elements and the heavenly bodies, animated by angelic beings, and which are leading to a degeneration and destruction. Being psychologically traumatised, faced with the deadly plague caused by the purported wrathful displeasure of the gods, the only means to avert the plague is the appeasement of the evil powers. Again, the fear of the harmful and destructive machinations of personal supernatural power is seen as critical to lure the people to initiate themselves into the cults of benevolent deities for protection. They wear apotropaic amulets; participate in rituals, and invoke good spirits and angels for protection.^{xlii} They view the cosmos as a non-smooth-working piece of machinery where the people can, however, enjoy a peaceful existence. But there is every sort of invisible power that can overturn the momentary tranquillity and replace it with catastrophe.^{xliii} In order to combat such forces, the letter is written, inserting the famous traditional hymn, though with some Christian expansions and modifications.

The implication of identifying the piece as hymnic Gattung, within which the *prwto,tokoj* assumes its full meaning, is obvious. But the exact context, in which the author employed the hymn or precisely the *prwto,tokoj* to address the Christian community in Asia Minor, is yet to be determined. That the letter is introduced with formal greetings makes it most probable that it will be read at the meeting of Christians. It suggests also that the hymn must have been employed within a Christian assembly. It is most probably a Eucharistic assembly in view of admonition and teaching (3:16; Eph. 5:19f; cf. Heb 13:15). In other words, the hymn is located within the context of prayer, praises and thanks.^{xliv} It is a thanksgiving hymn (cf. Did. 10.7 & Phil 2:10f.) used during a Eucharistic celebration.

The association of the hymn with ‘thanksgiving’ (cf. 1:12) would mean that the hymn could not have been a dogmatic expression of the ‘Glaubensformeln’.^{xlv} Although the content of the hymn is related to the ‘Bekenntnisse’ (profession of faith) and ‘Glaubensformeln’ of the community, it has another function within the liturgical assembly. It proclaims the sovereignty of Christ over and above all principalities and powers. In other words, it serves to dissipate the fear of the astral and underworld powers, and also to discourage the people from

soliciting for the help and protection of the intermediary spirits and angels. At the same time the people are encouraged to accept Christ with an undivided mind and heart as the *first* among all powers and principalities. Hence he alone should be looked upon as the *firstborn*. Every honour and praise, rights and privileges as the *firstborn* should be accorded to him. The hymn is, therefore, a liturgical proclamation of the sovereignty of Christ. The praise of the Lord Jesus Christ as the mediator of creation and reconciler is simultaneously a liturgical demonstration of the creative supra-human power. It counteracts the false belief in the roles of other spirits as supplementary to the cosmic and soteriological role of Christ. In other words, the issue at stake has no direct relationship with the ‘*nature*’ but the ‘*role*’ of Christ. So, the primary question is not ‘who is Christ’, but ‘what is Christ’. No matter how subtle the distinction would appear, it is the crux of the entire discussion.

6. The Challenge of the Heresy of Col.1:15, 18

One of the major stress points in the study is that *prwto,tokoj*, as used within the context of Col. 1:15-20, does not refer to the *divine nature of Christ*, and may not be subjected to ‘*eivkw,n* theology.’^{xlvi} It is also necessary to note that (i) the text does not in any form consider *tokoj* (birth) as an antithesis of *kti,shj* (creation); (ii) rather the emphasis of the text is more on the relationship between the *prwto,tokoj* (firstborn) and *kti,shj* (creation); and (iii) the relationship between God and the *prwto,tokoj* is outside the sphere of the inquiry. The early Fathers of the Church are equally conscious of these distinctions in their consideration of the passage. They understand the phrase *prwto,tokoj pa,shj kti,sewj* as an expression of a special title of ‘sovereignty’, just as Christ is called the *monogenh,j* or *lo,goj* of the Father. Whether one should from this draw a conclusion on the pre-existence of Christ is open,^{xlvii} but wide and dangerous. With the Arian heresy, however, a new reading of the Colossian *prwto,tokoj* sets in. It is now understood in the sense of ‘*genitus ante*,’^{xlviii} which is, of course, alien to the original understanding of the word as a metaphoric expression of a title of hierarchy.^{xlix}

Even if Michealis’ argument that the full meaning of the *prwto,tokoj pa,shj kti,sewj* in Col 1:15 could be derived from the *o[ti* clause of v.16 is accepted, it must be with high sense of caution. According to him, the clause presents Christ as the Mediator at creation to whom all

creatures without exception owe their creation. Therefore, if the expression refers to the ‘mediation in creation’ through Christ, it cannot be saying at the same time that he is created as the first creature. That is fully correct. But the main objection to this view is the attempt to read *pa,shj kti,sewj* as *genitivum partitivus*. While in the actual sense it is a *genitivum comparationis*.

To hold to the *genitivum partitivus* overlabours *to,koj*. But it is clear that with the exception of Lk 2:7 *to,koj* is never emphasised in any passage in the NT with reference to Christ, especially in Col. 1:18. So, any argument, which would bring *-to,koj* into tension with *kti,sij* (and *kti,zesqai* in 1:16) is suspicious. “Birth” and “creation” are different concepts. *Prwto,tokoj* cannot be regarded as a simply synonym of *prwto,ktistoj*. So, the only possible way is to take *prwto,tokoj* in the sense of ‘sovereignty’. It simply means the unique supremacy of Christ over all creatures as the mediator of their creation. The succeeding statement in 1:17a: *auvto,j evstin pro. pa,ntwn*, emphasises the same supremacy from the point of responsibility while 1:17b draws the conclusion from 1:16.¹

If *prwto,tokoj* in Col 1:15, 18 expresses supremacy, this is because of the high privilege and responsibility of the *firstborn* in the OT and in later Judaism. It is true that the term could denote some special relationship with God. But that is far from the case in Col 1:15. Christ’s relationship with God is already described in v.13 by employing the phrase *tou/ ui`ou/ th/j avga,phj avtou/* (of his beloved son). The meanings and ideas associated with both *ui`o.j avgaph,sewj* and *prwto,tokoj* can conveniently be read from the Ps Sol 13:9. But if Col 1:15 refers to the relationship of Christ to all creatures as the Mediator of their creation, the idea must be alien to the OT. Though the Jewish idea of *sofi,a* may be significant to understand most of the implications of the use of the word in the NT (also Prov. 8:22), it has no direct influence, since there is no express thought of mediation in creation here. For this reason, the study takes its point of departure by emphasising the metaphoric use of the *prwto,tokoj* in Col 1:15, 18 and its functional role, which describes the relationship between Christ and humanity, but not between God and Christ. So, the dominant approach, which dates back to the polemic counter attack against Arianism, and which interprets Col 1:15, 18 from the ‘pre-existence theology,’¹¹ seems to have missed the mark. The idea of *prwto,tokoj* in the Colossians (1:15, 18) is more of a ‘presence theology’.

The negative issue that sadly affected the concept of *prwto,tokoj* in theological inquiry and interpretation is the Arian influence. The Arians consciously or unconsciously raised a crucial theological concern but made use of the wrong text (Col 1:15 & 18) to take a position. Some of the Fathers of the Church and even later theologians, responding to the Arians' demand, followed suit, using the same wrong text to answer the Arians objections. The result is simply the alienation of Jesus from the human community as the *prwto,tokoj* and the alienation of the human person from participating in the divine community. The human person simply lost the sense of the meaning of the word. Christ is then conceived always being with the Father, gone and never to commune with humanity. The feelings of the 'nearness' of Christ is then theologically distorted. He no longer plays the role of the firstborn, who is always there for the interest of the family.

The fundamental question, however, remains: is Christ the '*firstborn*' because he is the 'image' of God,^{liii} or the 'image' of God because he is the 'firstborn' (cf. v.15)? The same question can be reframed in relation to the *prwto,tokoj* (firstborn) and the *kefah*, (head). That is, is Jesus the '*firstborn*' because he is the 'head' or the head because he is the '*firstborn*' (v.18)? For the Igbo of Nigeria, the place of the *prwto,tokoj* takes always precedence. One can then see it as another accent given to the discussion. The theological import is equally rich and desirable. It brings Christ back to the people as the '*firstborn*' in the family of believers.

7. The Theological Import of the prwto,tokoj in its Original Context

The two verses (15 and 18) of the *prwto,tokoj*, structurally located in the two different stanzas of the hymn, represent the two correlative aspects of the hymn: Christ as the agent of creation and as the agent of redemption. The hymn is adapted in such a way as to underscore Christ's supremacy over all creations, including angels, principalities and power both in heaven and on earth, thus dissuading the Colossians from any other veneration and invocation outside Christ. One of the dominant motifs is the subordination of the 'angelic 'powers' as part of the creation over which Christ is the Lord (v.16). The structural emphasis on the 'powers' betrays the fear of the Colossians. It demonstrates the underlying belief of the Colossians regarding the existence and operation of supernatural evil forces.^{liiii} So by declaring Jesus 'the firstborn of all creation' his cosmic sovereignty and agency

could not have been better expressed.^{liv} This has particular relevance for the Colossians, being beset by false philosophies that encouraged them to pay homage to various cosmic potentates. Thus, Christ's sovereignty, which is manifestly present in the phrase,^{lv} is affirmed. It is a rank of sovereignty, not of birth. It is a title, which recognises Jesus both as the Son of David and as the Wisdom of God, 'the Sovereign who is installed by God through resurrection as Lord over not only the Church but the whole universe,'^{lvi} including the angelic 'powers', which dominate the world of the Colossians. Hence Christ is Lord to and of all the various cosmic potentates.^{lvii} His sanctity, care and responsibility, his authority, supremacy and Lordship are simply rooted in the *prwto,tokoj* (vv.15 & 18). The stress makes *pa,shj kti,sewj* dependent on *prwto,tokoj*, and the *firstborn* stands in a relationship to creation as its mediator. The direction becomes clear. There is a shift of emphasis from Jesus' relation to God to his relation to believers and the result of such a relationship in their lives. This relationship is interpreted not in terms of temporal priority of the pre-existent Christ, but of his supremacy.

Interesting also is the author's realism. The hymn acknowledges the various 'powers' as part of creation. But these powers are subject to the Lordship of Christ. Christ is not just one among the deities. He is not a kind of angelic mediatory figure. He is simply the firstborn, who is above all. His authority is unique,^{lviii} his reign universal, and his power absolute.^{lix} The question of the nature of Christ, that is, whether he is created, when, where and by whom, is not the issue in Col 1:15, 18.

There is, however, a transition from Christ being the head of all creation to being the head of the Church. In spite of the controversy associated with the relationship between the semantics of *kefahl*, (head) and *sw/ma* (body) in relation to *th/j evkkhlhsi,a* (the Church) and *ko,smoj* (the world),^{lx} the emphasis is on Christ's leadership for his people. He is the source of the Church's life and the energy for its growth. It does not only emphasis the unity of the members of the Church and the Church itself with Christ. It demands for a total surrender to the leadership and power of Christ (Col 2:19). The Colossians therefore have no need for any additional help, which 'the philosophies' promise. With Christ they are covered and can cope with the onslaught of the 'powers'.

The second stanza of the hymn praises Christ as the Lord of reconciliation. It is not only Christ's pre-eminence as Lord that is

emphasised, but also the basis for individual and communal freedom from the demonic powers. As the *firstborn*, he reconciles all, thus uniting them with him, guaranteeing them protection and even raising the powers of the believers above the evil cosmic powers. He is the *avrch*, ('the beginning')^{lxi} of the new humanity because he is the '*firstborn* from the dead' (v.18). He holds the leading position of power and authority because he is 'first above all creation' (v.15). He is *pro. pa,ntwn* (v.17). The idea of rulership is also implied in the expression just as one can read in Rev. 3:14 where Christ is named 'the ruler of God's creation' (*h' avrch. th/j kti,sewj tou/ qeou/*). When Christ as the beginning is correlated with the statement that he is the goal of creation (v.16), we have here a concept similar to the declaration in the Apocalypse that Christ is the beginning and end, the Alpha and Omega (Rev 1:8; 21:6; 22:13). He is the beginning, the Lord of and over creation (including the powers) and the church. As the '*firstborn* from the dead', the power of Christ over one of his greatest enemies — death — is extolled. The hostile angelic forces are also defeated through his death on the cross (Col 2:15), which has made possible for reconciliation and peace.^{lxii} A striking significance of the letter, among others, is seen as the all-inclusive soteriology. Here salvation will include all people, all creation and the whole of the cosmos.^{lxiii} It embraces both history and nature and, therefore, has political and ecological, implications. The radical nature of this redemption for all dimensions of life will continue to shape the soteriological thrust of discussion of Colossians into the future.^{lxiv}

8. Summary and Conclusion

It is observed from the foregone discussion that the closest word in English that could translate *prwto,tokoj* (Greek) is 'firstborn', which has a Hebrew cognate of *rwkb*. However, the term is better attested in the Judeo-Christian scriptures. Thus in the Old Testament tradition, it connotes a sense of relationship of a special kind, which include sanctify, preciousness, affection, honour, authority, responsibility, sovereignty and right to succession. The *prwto,tokoj* stands as a preferential heir without the possibility of a second of the same kind. It is the property of the deity, the most appropriate and worthy victim for the highest sacrifice to appease the deity or YHWH and at the same time such sacrifice could assure the family or society special favour. It is to the credit of the New Testament to make a clear cut distinction

between *prwto,tokoj* and *monogenh,j* without denying some overlap. In other words, *prwto,tokoj* is not an absolute synonym of *monogenh,j*. It is also discovered that the primary interest of the text (Col 1:15-20) is on the freedom and security of the human person from the controlling forces of fates, the fear of the chthonic spirits, the astral power and the underworld powers. Such fear is structurally rooted in the folk's religion which supports the belief in invocation of intermediary spirits and angels for protection. The practice demeans the cosmic and soteriological role of Christ as the mediator between creation and the creator. It is an implicit indictment against the sufficiency of Christ by the Colossian Christians: the power and authority of Christ, and their access to his power and authority is no longer adequate to their daily life for protection from the hostile "powers". So, the letter is to bolster the faith of the community (1:3-14; 2:2-3) and at the same time correct the erroneous teachings (2:4,8,16,18-20).

The hymn is an expression of 'thanksgiving' (cf. 1:12). It is a liturgical proclamation and reaffirmation of the role of Christ as the firstborn of all creation. Consequently, all creation, all powers and principalities are subjected to his power. Hence he alone should be looked upon as the *firstborn*. Every honour and praise, rights and privileges due to the *firstborn* should be accorded to him. He alone is the mediator of creation and reconciler. So, the primary interest is not 'who is Christ', but 'what is Christ'.

Theologically, the hymn acknowledged the existence of other astral and netherworld powers and forces yet places Christ above them all. Thus Christ's sovereignty is the stress. The emphasis is not a temporal priority of the pre-existence but supremacy. The role of Christ is understood as both the Son of David and the Wisdom of God, 'the Sovereign who is installed by God through resurrection as Lord over not only the Church but the whole universe,' including the angelic 'powers', which dominate the world of the Colossians. Hence Christ is Lord to and of all the various cosmic potentates. His sanctity, care and responsibility, his authority, supremacy and Lordship are simply rooted in the *prwto,tokoj* (vv.15 & 18). In other words, *pa,shj kti,sewj* is dependent on *prwto,tokoj* and makes it clear that the *firstborn* stands in a relationship to creation as its mediator.

Again, Christ is the firstborn both within and outside the Church. Consequently, the origin, survival and continual existence of the

Church are solely on Christ. So, with Christ the Colossians are assured of every protection from the onslaught of the ‘powers’. Christ is not only the beginning, the Lord of and over creation (including the powers) and the church; he is also the ‘firstborn from the dead’. The power of Christ over one of his greatest enemies — death — is extolled. The hostile angelic forces are also defeated through his death on the cross (Col 2:15), which has made it possible for reconciliation and peace. He is simply the beginning of the new humanity, the firstborn from the dead.

So, the analysis shows that the temporal priority is not the primary interest of the *prwtōtokoj* in Col 1:15-20, but the supremacy among the angelic forces. That is to say, the term carries with it a reference to the superior rank and dignity of Christ. The presence of *avrch*, points also in the same direction, and the parallel *prwtōtokoj* saying in 1:15 supports an understanding of a ‘rank’ based on the ‘sovereignty’ of Christ. Christ, therefore, from all creation bears the rank of a *prwtōtokoj* in relation to every creature, the living and the dead, for he is also the firstborn from the dead, the risen Lord.^{lxv}

The purpose of the study is achieved if the reader comes to the knowledge that *prwtōtokoj* in Colossians 1:15, 18 does not refer to the divine origin of Christ, but his sovereignty. Again, the reader understands that the interest of the study is a proof or denial of the divine origin and pre-existence of Christ. The insistence is rather that the text of Col 1:15-18 is not a material for such project. The only possible information, which the text contains, is the believers’ relationship with Christ as the *prwtōtokoj*, to whom they owe their allegiance. The rediscovery of the meaning of *prwtōtokoj* saves exegetes from *disproportionate* Christological interpretation of the text. Other aspects of the text such as ecclesiology and soteriology should equally be considered as part of the textual implications. Besides the contribution this study makes NT scholarship circle, it serves as a veritable material for pastoral workers as well as Christians who wish to deepen their faith and correctly appreciat

ⁱ A.T. Lincoln, “The Letter to the Colossians. Introduction, Commentary and Reflection” In *The New Interpreter’s Bible* 12 Vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002, CD Edition)

- ii E. Lohmeyer, *Die Briefe an die Kolosser und an Philemon* (Göttingen, ³1930), 41.
- iii M. Dibelius & A. Greeven, *An die Kolosser, Epheser, an Philemon* (Tübingen, ³1953).
- iv A. Hockel, *Christus der Erstgeborene. Zur Geschichte der Exegese von Kol 1,15* (Düsseldorf, 1965).
- v F. Baß & A. Debrunner, *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch* (Göttingen, 1961), 42.
- vi One sees this clearly in the arguments presented by .H. Franke, *Kritisch-exegetisches Handbuch über die Briefe an die Philipper, Kolosser und Philemon*, Göttingen, ⁵1886, 304-307, M. Meinertz, *Der Kolosserbrief*, Bonn, ⁴1931 and K. Staab, *Die Gefangenschaftsbrieife*, Regensburg, ³1959, 77, where the introduction the definite article $\tau\eta/\jmath$ and an additional emphasis on $\rho\acute{\rho}\omega, \tau\omicron(j)$ are made the case for a difference in the meaning of the word, which, of course, comparatively spares Christ from being numbered among the creatures.
- vii Cf. E. Schweizer *The Letter to the Colossians*, trans. A. Chester (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 253; P. Gorday. *Colossians, 1–2 Thessalonians, 1–2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon* ACCSNT 9. (Leicester: InterVarsity, 2000), 12–14.
- viii The reading of the inscription is $w\grave{d}ei, ni\ de. Moi/ra\ prwtoto, kou\ me\ te, knou\ pro. j\ te, loj\ h=gte\ bi, ou:$ In the labours of the birth of my firstborn child fate led me to the end of life. (transl. by me) cf. C.C. Edgar, “More Tomb-Stones from Tell el Yahoudie.” *Annales du service des antiquités de l’Égypte* 22, 1922, 9f. See also H. Langkammer, “ $\rho\acute{\rho}\omega, \tau\omicron koj,$ ” in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3 Vols, ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmanns, 1990), E-copy.
- ix J.B. Frey, “La signification du terme $\rho\acute{\rho}\omega, \tau\omicron koj$ d’après une inscription juive”. *Biblica* 11 (1930), 373-390 would insist that both are identical. That is $\rho\acute{\rho}\omega, \tau\omicron koj$ implying $monogenh, j$.
- x cf. Michealis’ account “ $\rho\acute{\rho}\omega, \gamma\omicron noj.$ ” In TDNT vol.VI 877, n.36 in relation to Lk 2:7.
- xi Cf. Scott Hahn, (ed.) *Catholic Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 2009) 346.
- xii Michealis, “ $\rho\acute{\rho}\omega, \gamma\omicron noj.$ ” 871! n.1 further argues that the two developments can hardly be independent. Since $\rho\acute{\rho}\omega, \gamma\omicron noj$ was available in the passive there was no need to promote $\rho\acute{\rho}\omega, \tau\omicron koj$, and $tek\text{-}\tau\omicron, koj$ leads more easily to an active, $gen\text{-}\gamma\omicron, noj$ more easily to a passive.

- ^{xiii} Being the first to open the womb of the woman does not only affect the status of the woman. It also affects the state of the man, who now assumes the role of father.
- ^{xiv} There is historical possibility of assuming the privilege without being the first to open the womb.
- ^{xv} M. Tsevat, “*rwkb (hrwkb, hrykb)*” In TDOT II, 121-27.
- ^{xvi} According to Michealis’ account, 872 and 74 instances of the use is located between Gen and Deut, 29 in Chr., usually in legal enactment or genealogies.
- ^{xvii} Cf. B. Keret, iii.16, *ANET*, 2nd ed. 146.
- ^{xviii} Cf. J. Milgrom, “First-born” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible. Supplementary volume*, ed. Keith Crim (Nashville, 1990), 337-338. The inscription on the tomb already cited gives further support to the idea.
- ^{xix} The firstlings of domestic animals were offered to the deity at the spring pastoral festival (at the yeaning period) by a sacrifice and communal meal. The firstborn possessed a peculiar sanctity and efficacy, and, when offered to the deity, guaranteed the fertility and continuity of the flock or herd, and released the remainder from taboo so they could be appropriated. There is possibly a relationship between this spring festival and the wilderness sacrifice of the Exodus account (Ex 3:18; 5:3; 8:27; cf. 10:25), as well as the later Passover celebration (Ex 34:18-20, 25-26). Subsequently the offering of firstlings was given new meaning in the context of the exodus faith (Ex 13:14-15 J; Deut 15:19-20D). In the early days of Palestinian existence the firstlings of flock and herd were sacrificed at the local sanctuary (the eighth day; Ex 22:29b-30E), and the worshiper partook of the meal. The firstling of an ass was to be redeemed with a lamb or have its neck broken (i.e., blood was not be shed as taboo; Ex 13:11-13; 34:19b, 20, J). In the Deuteronomic regulations the sacrifice was to be an unblemished animal (not previously worked or shorn, since sacred), offered perhaps yearly at the central sanctuary, with the meal eaten by the owner and his household. The blemished were not to be sacrificed, but eaten in the towns (Deut 15:19-23). In the Priestly Code the sacrifices became the property of the priest. Unclean animals were redeemed when a month old at five shekels (Num 18:15-18), or at valuation plus a fifth; if not redeemed, they were to be sold by the priest at valuation (Lev 27:26). When the Levites took the place of the firstborn of Israel (Num. 3:12; 8:16), possibly all firstling domestic animals were to redeemed price (cf. Num 3:41). At this period the offering became a virtual tax or tribute, and not only the firstborn, but also a tithe of heard and flock, were considered to belong Yahweh (Lev 27:32; cf. Tob 5:13) and consequently to the priests.
- ^{xx} Cf. W. Michealis’ account “*prwto, gonoj*” 873.

- ^{xxi} It gives rise to the rabbinic interpretation, which alludes the concept to the Messiah. The same term, which has $\rho\rho\omega\tau\omicron, \gamma\omicron\omicron\omicron\gamma$ as a Greek equivalent (LXX), will be used in the NT to refer to Christ (Rom 8:29 and Col 1:15).
- ^{xxii} Thus the Bible may be preserving the memory of the firstborn bearing a sacred status, and his replacement by the Levites (Num 3:11-13, 40ff; 8:14-18) may reflect the establishment of a professional priestly class, which later undermines the sanctity.
- ^{xxiii} Michealis, “ $\rho\rho\omega\tau\omicron, \gamma\omicron\omicron\omicron\gamma$ ” 876.
- ^{xxiv} Different motifs can be drawn from the text depending on the interpretation taken up: the motif of spiritual umbrage in Luke is associated with Ex 13:12; 34:19; cf. Lk 2:23) and the Bethlehem motif (Lk 2:1-5) with Ex 13:12 and the motif of spiritual umbrage in Luke). In relation to the angel’s promise (Lk 1:32f) and the Bethlehem motif (2:1-5) $\rho\rho\omega\tau\omicron/\tau\omicron\kappa\omicron\gamma$ becomes a referent to the child as the firstborn of the line of David. Hence in 2:7
- ^{xxv} Michealis, W., “ $\rho\rho\omega\tau\omicron, \gamma\omicron\omicron\omicron\gamma$ ” In TDNT vol. VI 871-881
- ^{xxvi} I have argued somewhere that synonym implies both necessary resemblance and permissible difference. It is often applied for a contextual explanation or a clarification of a meaning with another lexical unit or proposition, which is considered more understandable.
- ^{xxvii} Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Bangalore: TPI, 2007) 599.
- ^{xxviii} Cf. Herodotus, *Hist.* 7.30.1; Xenophon, *Anab.* 1.2.6.
- ^{xxix} Drawing his sources from Strabo (*Geogr.* 12.18.16) and Pliny (*Nat. Hist.* 21.51), M.P. Horgan, “The Letter to the Colossians” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* ed. Raymond Brown et al (London, 1990), 876 (876-882), argues for the importance of the city. His argument is based on ‘*colossinus*’, a name that signifies a dark red dye for wool, which is produced in the famous wool and textile industry of Colossae.
- ^{xxx} cf. Cicero, *Pro Flacc.* 28; Josephus, *Ant.* 12.3.4 §149-50.
- ^{xxxi} It would appear that after the earthquake of 60/61 A.D, which destroyed most of the cities in the region, there is no recorded attempt to rebuild Colossae. Hence the neighbouring cities of Hierapolis and Laodicea (cf 2:1; 4:12, 15-16; also Rev. 3:17) would overshadow its prominence. Cf. V.P. Furnish, “The Letter of Paul to the Colossians” in *The Interpreter’s One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Charles M. Laymon, Nashville, 1971, 857 .
- ^{xxxii} cf. J. Lähnemann, *Der Kolosserbrief* (SNT 3; Gütersloh, 1971, 82-100.
- ^{xxxiii} Furnish, “The Letter of Paul to the Colossians” 856-864.
- ^{xxxiv} C.E. Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism: the interface between Christianity and Fold Belief at Colossae*, [WUNT 2:77] (Tübingen, 1995), 246.

- ^{xxxv} It is practically difficult, if not impossible to identify the opponents or the false teachers in Colossae with a particular group and to classify their teaching. Horgan, "The Letter to the Colossians" 54:1-28
- ^{xxxvi} Cf. Horgan, "The Letter to the Colossians" 13 argues that differences in language, style and thought from the rest of Colossian and from the undisputed Pauline letters suggest that this hymnic section was not composed by the author of the letter. Rather most of the part must have been adapted from traditional material to serve the instructional purposes of the letter. P. Benoit, L'hymne christologique de Col 1,15-20," in J. Neusner (ed.), *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults*, Fest. M. Smith (Leiden, 1975), 1. 226-63 argues that the author of the book composed the hymn, but E. Käsemann, "A Primitive Christian Baptismal Liturgy," in *Essays on New Testament Themes*, W.J. Montague, SBT 41 (London, 1964), 149-68, 155 describes it as the supra-historical and metaphysical drama of the Gnostic Redeemer." That is to say that the origins of the hymn are gnostic, and not Christian.
- ^{xxxvii} Horgan, "The Letter to the Colossians," 13
- ^{xxxviii} P. Pokorný, *Colossians. A Commentary* (Peabody, 1991), 66 makes it very clear that the hymn is never Gnostic, though it could be best interpreted in the framework of the Hellenistic-Jewish wisdom speculation and *logos* teaching. J. Fossum, "Colossians 1.15-18a in the Light of Jewish Mysticism and Gnosticism." *NTS* 35, (1989) 183-201 in the Light of Jewish Mysticism and Gnosticism." 183-201 assumes again the thesis of Käsemann. Cf. Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism*, 248, n.4 summary of the Fossum's view and his critique ("Colossians 1.15-18a in the Light of Jewish Mysticism and Gnosticism." *NTS* 35, (1989) 183-201).
- ^{xxxix} Many other scholars understand the hymn as Paul's creative act. The argument ranges from literary to theology. Cf. N.T. Wright, "Poetry and Theology in Colossians 1.15-20." *NTS* 36 (1990) 444-68 (reprinted in *The Climax of the Covenant*. Minneapolis, 1991, 99-119; S.E. Porter, *Katalla, ssw in Ancient Greek Literature with Reference to the Pauline Writings*, Estudios de Filología Neotestamentaria 5, Cordoba, 1994; S. Baugh, "The Poetic Form of Col 1:15-20." *WTJ* 47 (1985) 227-44; J.F. Balchin, "Colossians 1:15-20: An Early Christian Hymn? The Arguments from Style." 65-94; L.R. Helyer, "Colossians 1:15-20: Pre-Pauline or Pauline?" *JET* 26 (1983) 167-79; N. Kehl, *Der Christushymnus im Kolosserbrief. Eine motivgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu Kol 1, 12-20* SMB 1 (Stuttgart: 1967), 162-64; C. Maurer, "Die Begründung der Herrschaft Christi über die Mächte nach Kolosser 1, 15-20." *Wort und Dienst*, N.S. 4 (1955), 71-93 esp. 85; Dibelius and Greeven, *An die Kolosser*, 10-12; P. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, WBC 44 (Waco: 1982), 40-42.

- ^{xi} The most recent opinions are more synchronic in approach with more interest on the final form of the hymn than on its origin. Cf. S.E. Fowl, *The Story of Christ in the Ethics of Paul*, JSNTSS 36 (Sheffield: 1990), 31-45, esp. 45; J-N. Aletti, *Saint Paul Épître aux Colossiens*, Études Bibliques, Nouvelle Série 20 (Paris, Gabalda, 1993), 89. Wright, "Poetry and Theology in Colossians 1.15-20." 445.
- ^{xli} Horgan, "The Letter to the Colossians", 54:6 (1-28).
- ^{xlii} M. Wolter, *Der Brief an die Kolosser. Der Brief an Philemon*. ÖTKNT 12 (Würzburg, 1993), 87.
- ^{xliii} Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism*, 264-65.
- ^{xliv} R. Deichgräber, *Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus in der frühen Christenheit. Untersuchungen zu Form, Sprache und Stil der frühchristlichen Hymnen* (Göttingen, 1967), 22.
- ^{xlv} Deichgräber, *Gotteshymnus* 145f.
- ^{xlvi} Deichgräber, *Gotteshymnus* 22.
- ^{xlvii} Hockel, *Christus der Erstgeborene*, 126.
- ^{xlviii} One finds this feature going back to Ambrose. Others, who later joined in the rank are Florus Diaconus, Lanfranc, Bruno dem Kartäuser, Petrus Lombardus, Bonaventura, Nikolaus von Lyra, Dionysius dem Kartäuser, Erasmus, Luther, Zwingli and Calvin. Cf. the work of Hockel, *Christus der Erstgeborene*, for more details.
- ^{xlix} Thanks to Estius and his camp (cf. Cornelius a Lapide, Calmet, Suicerus, Bengel, Bisping, Franke, Allioli, who place some limitation to it, and open the way for Lohmeyer, Argyle, Greeven, Meinertz and Staab to return to the original understanding as an "sovereign" title'.
- ¹ Michealis, W., "πρωτο, γονοj" 878.
- ^{li} Cf. Merklein, H., *Zur Entstehung der urchristlichen Aussage vom präexistenten Sohn Gottes* 34,45.
- ^{lii} Deichgräber, R., 22 suggest what is logically unacceptable in this work.
- ^{liii} Cf. E. Schweizer, *Colossians*, 58-59; indem, "sw/ma". *Die Christ-Vorstellung im Epheserbrief*, in *Judentum, Urchristentum, Kirche*. BZNW 26, ed. W. Eltester, Berlin, 1964, 172-87,
- ^{liv} Furnish, "The Letter of Paul to the Colossians" 858-59.
- ^{lv} A.J.M. Wedderburn, "The Theology of Colossians," in *The Theology of the Later Pauline Letters*, Cambridge, 1993, 1-71 (25).
- ^{lvi} J.G. Gibbs, *Creation and Redemption. A Study in Pauline Theology*. SupNovT 26 (Leiden, 1971), 104.
- ^{lvii} Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism*, 252.
- ^{lviii} The uniqueness of Christ's authority is sometimes conceived as primordial, thus going back to the pre-Christian cosmogonic mythology, which spoke of a "primeval man" — sometimes, identified as Adam — who was the 'head' of the cosmos, his 'body'. The hymn apparently draws on this idea,

declaring that Christ is this primeval man, the cosmic redeemer, in whom the whole universe finds its being and destiny. In adapting this hymn the author has probably inserted the church.

^{lix} Furnish, "The Letter of Paul to the Colossians", 859.

^{lx} Pokorný, *Colossians*, 82; Schweizer, *Colossians*, 58-59; indem, "sw/ma". Christ-Vorstellung im Epheserbrief." In W. Eltester (ed), *Judentum, Urchristentum, Kirche*. BZNW 2 (Berlin, 1964), 172-87, esp. 179-82; H. Hegemann, *Die Vorstellung vom Schöpfungsmittler im hellenistischen Judentum und Urchristentum* [TU 82] Berlin, 1961, 138-57.

^{lxi} G. Delling, "αἰρῶν," TDNT, Kittel, G. ed., vol. 1, Grand Rapids, 1964, 481-84: The expression denotes primacy, whether in a temporal sense or with reference to dominion and power.

^{lxii} Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism*, 261.

^{lxiii} Gorday, *Colossians*, 15-21.

^{lxiv} Sylvia C. Keesmaat, "Book of Colossians:" In Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2005), 119 (e-copy).

^{lxv} Michealis, W., "πρωτο, γονοj." 877-78.