Christ's Supremacy: Colossians 1:15-20 and Its Implication in Education

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Abstract

Supremacy of Christ in Col. 1:15-20 is essential to Christian faith. Many attempts have been made to examine this passage and mostly from the theological point of view. The aim of this article is to reexamine this passage and propose an analysis from the perspective of Christian education (with the implications) by firstly exegeting the passage in Colossian's context. The exegesis begins with providing the translation form the Greek text, proposing the structure followed by demonstrating the critical issue in each section of the structure, and finally summarizing the principles. The next step is to demonstrate the analysis from the perspective of Christian education on every section in the structure, followed by the significance of this passage in Christian education.

Keywords: *Supremacy of Christ, In Him, Through Him, For Him, All Things, Image of Invisible God, Out of the Death, First-Born.*

Literal Translation of Colossians 1:15-20

15 He[1] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, 16 because[2] in him[3] were created[4] all things in the heavens and on the earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones whether lordships whether rulers whether authorities; all things through him and for him have been created;[5] 17 and he, he[6] is before everything and all things in him have held together,[7] 18 and he, he is the head of the body namely the church;[8] he is the beginning, the firstborn out of the dead, that[9] he, he may become first in all things.19

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[1] Construction in some respect. This is the pleonastic use of the relative pronoun, so it is translated as personal pronoun, BDAG, 726.

[2] The causal use of "ὅτι", see BDAG, 732.

[3] The meaning of "in him" is in association with him. The use of relationship of preposition "in". BDAG, 327.

[4] It is Aorist tense in Greek. The meaning is like a snapshot action.

[5] In Greek, Perfect indicative passive. Perfect tense means past action that result in the present time, the time of the one who uses this tense.
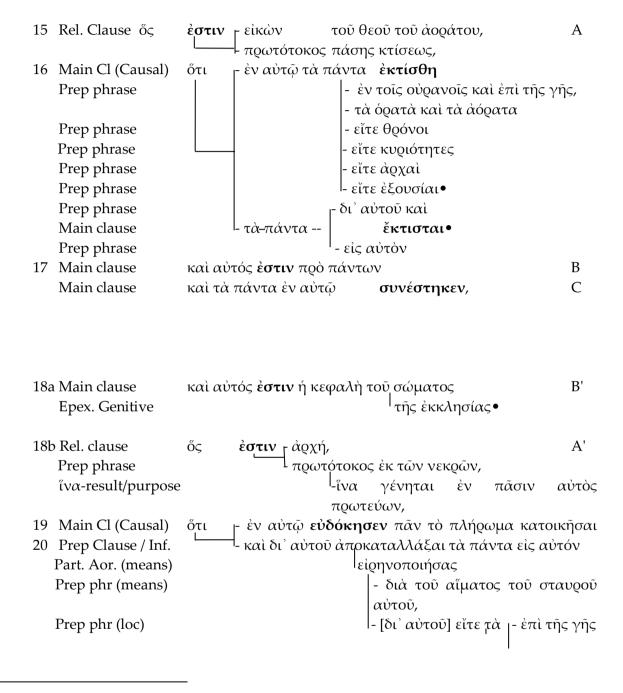
[6] The double of he is to maintain the emphatic of 3rd personal pronoun. In Greek the subject is already in the verb to be Danker.

[7] This is intransitive Perfect indicative active. See BDAG, 973. For the meaning of perfect tense. See note 4.

[8] The church is apposition (epexegetical) to the body.

[9] This is " ἵνα" clause. The meaning can be purpose or result but here is indifferent. BDAG, 477.

because in him[10] all the fullness was pleased to dwell 20 and through him to reconcile all things for him, by means of making peace through the blood of his cross, [through him][11] whether things upon the land or things in the heaven.

15 Rel. Clause ὅς	**ἐστιν**	⌐ εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου,	A
		└─ πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως,	
16 Main Cl (Causal) ὅτι		⌐ ἐν αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα **ἐκτίσθη**	
Prep phrase		- ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς,	
		- τὰ ὁρατὰ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα	
Prep phrase		- εἴτε θρόνοι	
Prep phrase		- εἴτε κυριότητες	
Prep phrase		- εἴτε ἀρχαὶ	
Prep phrase		- εἴτε ἐξουσίαι•	
Prep phrase		⌐ δι᾽ αὐτοῦ καὶ	
Main clause	└ τὰ-πάντα --	**ἔκτισται•**	
Prep phrase		└ - εἰς αὐτὸν	
17 Main clause	καὶ αὐτός **ἐστιν** πρὸ πάντων		B
Main clause	καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ	**συνέστηκεν,**	C
18a Main clause	καὶ αὐτός **ἐστιν** ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος		B'
Epex. Genitive		τῆς ἐκκλησίας•	
18b Rel. clause ὅς	**ἐστιν**	⌐ ἀρχή,	A'
Prep phrase		└ πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν,	
ἵνα-result/purpose		-ἵνα γένηται ἐν πᾶσιν αὐτὸς πρωτεύων,	
19 Main Cl (Causal) ὅτι		⌐ ἐν αὐτῷ **εὐδόκησεν** πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι	
20 Prep Clause / Inf.		└ καὶ δι᾽ αὐτοῦ ἀποκαταλλάξαι τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτόν	
Part. Aor. (means)		εἰρηνοποιήσας	
Prep phr (means)		- διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ,	
Prep phr (loc)		- [δι᾽ αὐτοῦ] εἴτε τὰ ⌐ - ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς	

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[10] Here the use of preposition "in" is the locative. BDAG, 326.

[11] This textual variant is found in several important manuscripts P46 a A C D1 Y 048vid. 33 R sy bo; Hil. Although many ancient texts do not have this phrase such as B D* F G I 0278 81 1175 1739 1881 2464 al latt sa, but this is included in the translation. The reason for inclusion in the translation lies in the rule of text criticism that the more difficult text is original. The translation can be either "through him" or "through it" (refers to his cross). Whatever is the translation, the whole concept is not influenced by this distinct translation. The whole concept is the reconciliation through Christ or through the cross. If the reconciliation is through Christ, it is for certain referred to the cross. If it is through the cross, it must be the cross of Christ.

Prep phr (loc)   - ἐν τοῖς
                                                                          οὐρανοῖς.

The Unity of Colossians 1:15-20; Literary Analysis.

Many scholars tend to dispute the authorship of this passage.[12] However, issues relating to the authorship of this passage will be briefly presented since the unity of the whole passage is more important. If we consider the life of Paul as an important factor, Paul as the author will likely be true. Paul, a zealous Pharisee, was advancing beyond many of his contemporaries.[13] After his conversion to Christianity, he became an Apostle of Christ[14] and was the last Apostle who saw Jesus.[15] Also, the letter to the Colossians was written near the end of his life,[16] thus one could expect of a more mature person with a profound knowledge of Christ, to be able to write such a beautiful praise or hymn.

The theme of this particular passage is the supremacy of Christ over all creation and over his body, the church, which is the new creation. This theme will foreshadow and serve as the ground for Paul to address many issues that are found throughout the letter. Although we do not find any epistolary features in this unit, this passage is distinct from the previous and the following passages. There are many grammatical and thematic features to prove the unity of this passage. At least six identified markers hold this passage, v.15-20, being one unit. First, the *inclusio* of "all things" in v.16 and v.20; "firstborn" in v.15 and v.18. Secondly, a lexical coherence of, "in him", "through him" and "for him" in v.16, 17, 19, 20. Third, the same pattern of, "He is - Because", (Proposition - Reason), in v.15-16 and v.18b-20. Fourth, in relation to the previous passage, v.9-14, there is a clear distinction of theme or content. The presence of "we" and "you" in v.9-14 are not correlated to the presence of "he" in v.15-20. This suggests the shift of content. Three significant words in v.15-20 such as, "in him", "through him" or "for him", and "all things", are not found in v.9-14, which again suggest a shift of the topic of v.9-4 to v.15-20.

Along with the fourth point, in the fifth marker, there are also several distinctive features between v.15-20 and the following verses, v.21-23. Keywords that occur in v.15-20 such as, "in him", "firstborn", and "the head", are not found in v.21-23. Also, a different personal pronoun is found in both passages. In v.15-20 the third personal pronoun is used and is different with the first personal pronoun in v.21-23. Finally, in Greek, the structure of

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[12] Scholars who maintain the authorship of Paul are: Nicholas. T. Wright, "Poetry and Theology in Colossians 1:15–20," *New Testament Studies* 36, no. 3 (July 5, 1990): 444; Peter O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon: Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 44* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1982), 40–42; J. C. O'Neill, "The Source of the Christology in Colossians," *New Testament Studies* 26, no. 1 (October 5, 1979): 87–100; John F. Balchin, "Colossians 1:15-20: An Early Christian Hymn? The Arguments from Style," *Vox Evangelica* 15 (1985): 65–66; Those who maintain the preexisting hymn are: Matthew E. Gordley, *The Colossian Hymn in Context*, 2; Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon: A Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

[13] This is the claim that Paul made by himself in Gal.1:14

[14] Gal. 2:9

[15] See Paul's confession in 1 Cor. 15:8

[16] Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green, and Marianne Meye Thompson, *Introducing the New Testament : Its Literature and Theology* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub, 2001), 420.

v.15-20 is almost perfectly symmetrical, while in the previous and the following passage, both are not. Such a symmetrical pattern or structure has led commentators to classify this distinct unit as Jewish poetry.[17]

This particular unit is part of the larger passage of Col. 1:3-23: the thanksgiving and intercession section.[18] The function of thanksgiving is to foreshadow the issues in the letter, which is evident when Col. 1:15-20 is further examined. Even through the practical issues seen in v. 3:17-4:6, Paul used this very unit which describes the supremacy of Christ as the head of the new creation, a principle to exhort the Colossians. Paul shrewdly located this passage in between v. 1:9-14 and v. 1:21-23 which is by no means incidental. Paul intentionally broke the connection of v. 9-14 with v. 21-23. By doing this, the Colossians' church, which Paul never visited before, will easily recognize this distinctive section to be very important and significant than the rest of the letters.

There are many views about the structure, particularly on how many strophes there are in this hymn. The number of strophes is varied from two,[19] three,[20] four,[21] or even five[22] strophes. The text itself utilizes the simplest pattern which is ABB'A'. Here the structure will follow the ABB'A' pattern with a modification, the presence of C; a center of the pattern that serves as a turning point. The structure is then arranged as A B C B' A'.

Section A, verse 15-16

Section A consists of the first proposition, verse 15, and reason, verse 16. The pattern of the proposition - reason holds this part together. The first proposition is introduced by the relative pronoun and the "he is" (ἐστιν) while the reason of the first proposition is marked by the particle "because" (ὅτι) to give an explanation for the proposition. The features that bind the section "reason" will be discussed in the "reason" topic.

The First Proposition (verse 15)

"he is the image of the invisible God"

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[17] Wright, "Poetry and Theology in Colossians 1:15–20," 444–45; Also Charles H. Talbert, Ephesians and Colossians, 184; Generally the pattern ABB'A' is found more in the Jewish poetry. The suggestion structure in this paper is ABCB'A', despite the issue of genre.

[18] Petr Pokorný, *Colossians : A Commentary*, trans. Siegfried S. Schatzmann (Peabody Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 23.

[19] See Gordley, *The Colossian Hymn in Context: An Exegesis in Light of Jewish and Greco-Roman Hymnic and Epistolary Convention*, 9.

[20] Ralph P. Martin, *Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon* (IBC;Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1991), 105–6.

[21] See Gordley, The Colossian Hymn in Context, 15; Wright classifies the passage as a poem, he introduces the structure as ABB'A'. In certain sense this poetry structure can be put in the four section division, see Nicholas. T. Wright, "Poetry and Theology in Colossians 1. 15–20," *New Testament Studies* 36, no. 3 (July 5, 1990): 447.

[22] Gordley, *The Colossian Hymn in Context*, 15.

The first proposition consists of two statements. The first statement of the first proposition is, "he is the image of invisible God". Paul begins this hymn with a statement that Christ is the image of God. The word, "image of the invisible God", is remarkable if we look at Paul's background. As a zealous Pharisee, who later converted to Christianity through his personal encounter with Jesus, Paul must be familiar with the principle that no one has ever seen God for because God is invisible. Therefore, by stating, "the image of the invisible God", Paul has made a powerful claim that the invisible God is now visible and is no longer a mystery. Christ is the image of the invisible God.

Many scholars have attempted to refer the meaning of "image" to Adam in Gen.1:26 or Rom. 5:12-21.[23] Such a reference is, of course, in Paul's mind if we examine his background before his conversion to Christianity. But the reference to Adam is not likely the meaning here since this may not be the main intention of Paul to the Colossians. The proposition clearly indicates the revealing of the mystery of the invisible God. By claiming that Christ is the image of the invisible God, the mystery of the invisible God that has been hidden is no longer a mystery. In other words, the mystery of God is now revealed in Christ, meaning to look at Christ is to look at God.

The truth that Christ is the revealed mystery of the invisible God fits very well to the context of Colossians as seen in Col. 1:24-29, 2:2-4, 8. The Colossians consisting of Christian Gentiles was familiar with the concept of the mysteries that were closely related to many deities in the Phrygian regions.[24] Through knowing numerous deities before their conversion to Christianity, this message of Paul will strengthen their faith in Christ. Christ is the mystery that has been revealed, so there is no need for them to return to their old lives that were filled with mystery in regard to the divine.

"The firstborn of all creation"

The second statement is, "the firstborn of all things". The word "firstborn" occurs only eight times in the New Testament, but it is found 130 times in the Septuagint, LXX.[25] The most frequent usage of this word is in the genealogy, with two aspects, the temporal and the priority of status in birth.[26] But again, the attempt of many scholars to seek its broadest meaning from many Old Testament references might be unfitting to the context.[27] When this title, the firstborn of all creation, is embedded in Christ, the meaning of this phrase refers to the priority of both temporal time and status but not as a creation. This "firstborn" complements to the "image" that Christ is not only the image but the firstborn of all creation, the first and the priority. Here, the supremacy of Christ over creation has been introduced.

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[23] Peter O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 43; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 58; But Talbert disagrees with such reference to Adam, see Charles H. Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians*, 187.

[24] Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *Colossians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, translated by Astrid B. Beck (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 10–11; The city of Colossae is part of the region of Phrygia.

[25] O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 43.

[26] O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 45.

[27] More discussion can be seen in O'Brien, 43–44.

The Reason of the Proposition (Because ... in him ... all things ... was created), verse 16.

The reason of the first proposition is introduced by "because" (ὅτι).[28] The inclusio of the verbs, "were created", and, "have been created", are clear markers that hold this "reason" section as one unit. There are another three important words to be highlighted. First, is the prepositional phrase, "in him" (ἐν αὐτῷ), the meaning of "all things", and the verb, "have been created".

The main difficulty is the usage of the preposition "in" (ἐν).[29] A crucial criteria to understand the phrase, "in him", is that it has to fit into the whole meaning of this verse. The usage as a close connection, "in association with", is the most likely. The explanation that Christ is the "image" and the "firstborn" is that God is always in association with Jesus, whether as the agent or a local (sphere) in creating all things. This implies that Christ is no less than God Himself. The emphasis on Christ is clearly identified by the location of "in him". The phrase, "in him", is shrewdly located immediately after the "because" instead of after the verb, "were created".

The second word deals with the meaning of "all things".[30] The arrangement of what is included in this "all things" is remarkable since it is "constructed chiastically in synonymous parallelism"[31]. The parallels are between "heaven" and "invisible", and between "earth" and "visible". This contrast is followed by four more words such as the thrones, lordships, rulers, and authorities. This explanation of all things indicates that nothing is an exception in the creation. Although it remains true that nothing is excluded from Christ, in the context of Colossians, the reference of the word "all things" could be different.

The context of Colossians will be helpful in understanding "all things". The Colossians with their Gentile background and pagan cults are likely to still suffer from their Gentile community. They might be threatened by the pagan teachings about the "all things" that once belonged to them.[32] The threads that may include rites or principles behind all these cults[33] are real, despite the dispute whether or not they have been found within the church. It is still disputed by scholars that whether all these threads are Gnosticism.[34]

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[28] See n. 2.

[29] See O'Brien, Colossians, Philemon, 45. The identification can be instrumental or local or relation. See BDAG, 326-9. If it is instrumental, then it is identical with "through him", thus, the "in" can be translated as "through", see Lohse, Colossians and Philemon, 50; while O'Brien following Bruce, suggests that "in" points to Christ as "sphere" or locative usage. But the best usage seems to be the expression of relationship, thus the "in" means "in association with", see n. 3.

[30] There are two main view to understand the "all things" either to Stoicism or Paul's own concept. See O'Brien, Colossians, Philemon, 45-46. To suggest as if Paul made use of the concept of Stoicism is weak, since there is no evidence that Paul was influenced by Stoicism. It is possible but not necessary for Paul to use the this familiar term of Stoicism, but with Paul's own concept.

[31] O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon: Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 44*, 46.

[32] Barth and Blanke, Colossians, 10. The term "Phrygian Mysteries" is used to describe the mysteries of many deities that are found in the region of Phrygia, where the city of Colossae is in this region. In many aspects this "Phrygian Mysteries" is similar to Gnosticism. See n. 34 below.

[33] Regarding the threads that include rites and the philosophy, several verses in Colossians may confirm it. See for instance Col.2:8, 2:14-16, 2:18, 2:20-23; 3:5-9.

[34] Gnosticism is a religious philosophical movement that occurs in the 2nd century of our era, but several characteristics seem to be found in the church of Colossians. Several important teachings

However, several issues of the Colossians might seem similar to the characteristics of Gnosticism, such as mystery (2:2), wisdom and knowledge (2:3), deceitful philosophy (2:8), the body that seems to be evil (2:9; 3:5-9), and asceticism and vision (2:15-18, 20-23).

For instance, Men, the moon god, is the controller of the heavenly world and the realm of the dead.[35] The forms of worship to all these gods include many rites such as procession and sacrifice, lamentation, and even dances.[36] The "all things" or "the All" in this pagan cult is understood as dependent upon and constituted by these deities.[37]

When the term "all things" and all its explanations are recalled by Paul in the letter in Col. 2:8, 2:14-15; 3:5-9, the Colossians will clearly understand it. The "all things" in the context of Colossians refers both to the hostile and the friendly.[38] The hostile ones referring to the pagan religions are clearly stated in Col. 1:21; 2:4, 8, 15-16, 20-23; 3:5-9. The friendly ones are found in the practical exhortation of Paul to the Colossians in 3:17-4:1. In this practical exhortation, Paul has shrewdly used the word "Lord" instead of Christ, which is similar to the word "lordships" in this "reason" section inverse 16.Thus, Paul in this verse, once again has cleverly foreshadowed the issues he is going to address in the letter. The implication to the Colossians is to focus on their faith merely in Christ and not on "all things".

The last issue of this verse is the verb, "created". This verb has served as the clearest mark of inclusio that strongly binds the unit A as a whole.[39] The contrast of the same two verbs "create" is identified by the distinction of the tense. The first verb, Aorist in tense, is "was created", while the second verb, perfect[40] in tense, is "have been created". The presence of "through him" and "for him" that is located beside the word, "all things have been created", has explicitly shown the continuation of creating by God, in association with Christ. Also, it tells how and for whom all these creations were created for.[41]

Section B, verse 17a

Section B can be identified by two features. First, the "he" (αὐτός), the third personal pronoun is emphatic to the verb, "he is" (ἐστιν). Second, the presence of the prepositional

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of this Gnosticism are: The body is evil while the spirit is good, and the desire to find secret knowledge for salvation, also the creation of the world is a cosmic accident by lesser deity. Achtemeier, Green, and Thompson, Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology, 412–13; Everett Ferguson, Background of Early Christianity, 2nd ed (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1993), 636–40.

[35] Barth and Blanke, *Colossians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 11.

[36] Barth and Blanke, 11.

[37] Barth and Blanke, 11.

[38] O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon: Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 44*, 46; Scholars has disputed on the coverage of "all things", whether solely hostile or include the friendly. In the context of Colossians, it seems that Paul is trying to reveal the supremacy of Christ in all things both friendly and hostile.

[39] This is all at once the strongest argument that this section should not be divided into another new section, except the subsection. Consequently this is a strong support to the structure that has been made.

[40] Perfect tense makes emphasis on the past time action with the present time result.

[41] Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 64.

phrase, "before all things" (πρὸ πάντων), indicates the distinction of the theme with section A. Here the preposition "before" (πρὸ) indicates the temporal priority that Christ is before Creation. In other words, Christ is not created, since his existence is before Creation. The phrase, "... before all things", affirms explicitly the pre-existence of Christ as that of God. Meaning the "have been created" in section A has now escalated to the explicit statement with the usage of an emphatic third personal pronoun and the verb, "he is". This pre-existence confirms and affirms Christ's special relation to God and being the Image of God-- the Image that exists in reality.

Section C, verse 17b

Section C is distinguished by two markers. The first marker is the verb, "have held together" (συνέστηκεν) which is perfect active in Greek, and the second is the prepositional phrase, "in him". The significance of the perfect tense is to emphasize the past action with the present result. This means that all things were not just created as in section B' but have been preserved continuously. The second marker, the prepositional phrase "in him" is also significant for it affirms that both the "old creation" and the "new creation" are grounded and preserved "in him".[42] The phrase "in him" occurs three times in verse 16, verse 17b and verse 19, and the second occurrence is located in the very center of the structure. So, whether it is the old or the new creation, all are "in him". This suggests the integration of all things. Peter O'Brien rightly points out that, "Apart from his *continuous* sustaining activity all would disintegrate".[43] Such a continuous preservation in Christ has laid the transition to the new creation that is also in Christ.

Section B', (he is the head of the body namely the church) verse 18a

Section B' parallels with section B but shifts in theme. The literary features of B' and B, the "he, he is" (αὐτός ἐστιν) is expected to be parallel. In section B', Christ is "the head of the body of the church". Implying Christ is now the ultimate, the beginning of his body, and the new creation. The association of the body to the church is Paul's letter. The word "body" occurs 94 times in the Pauline epistles.[44] The association of the body with the church occurs in many places such as in Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 10:17, 11:27; and Eph. 1:23, 3:6, 5:23. Thus the word "the church" is not added by Paul.[45]

The statement, "he is the head of the body namely the church", implies the indispensable relationship between the head and the body, although both are different.[46] The head is the source of the body to live and grow. So, in all aspects, the body should live

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[42] O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon: Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 44*, 47.

[43] O'Brien, 47.

[44] Pauline letters are from Romans to Philemon, thirteen epistles.

[45] The more speculative view is to equate the relation of "body" and "head" to that of Greek philosophy, then claim that this particular passage even belongs to this non-Christian philosophy. This paper has no need to address this highly speculative view. For a brief discussion see O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 48-49.

[46] 1 Cor 12:21; Eph 4:15.

and grow in Christ as the head. The necessity of the body, which is the church as the new creation, is to live and grow from the head in unit B', has foreshadowed the themes in the letter seen in Col. 1:24; 2:6-7, 18-19; 3:8-11.

Section A', The Second Proposition and the Second Reason (verse 18b-20)

The features that mark the unity of the last section A' is the pattern of "he is - because" (proposition - reason). This pattern has two functions, to bind this section A' as one unit and as the inclusio of "he is" v.15 with v.18b and "because" in v.16 with v.19-20, which unifies the whole passage of Col. 1:15-20. The two functions are found in the lexical coherence of "him", whether "in him" or "through him" or "for him". This lexical coherence binds this section A' as one unit and holds the whole passage of Col.1:15-20 altogether. Another inclusio of "in heaven" and "upon the earth" also holds both section A-A' in parallel.

Second Proposition ("the beginning, the firstborn from the death, that ...)

The meaning of the "beginning" refers to the primacy with two senses, temporal and sovereignty.[47] The reference to temporal will imply that there are still others to follow after the beginning, while the reference to the sovereignty implies conquering over death. There is a shift of theme between section A and A'. If in section A, the supremacy is over all creation, thus, in section A', the supremacy is over death than just all creation. The resurrection of Christ is the evidence of this sovereignty. The result or purpose of the resurrection is confirmed by the "ἵνα" clause, that Christ is to be the first in all things. Again, the sense of the next to come is clear.

The resurrection of Christ from death once again fits to the historical context of Colossians in Col. 2:12-13; 3:1-10. The confirmation of the temporal sense of primacy is clear when Paul reminds the Colossians, that they are risen with Christ, stated in Col. 1:21-22; 2:12-13; and 2:30-3:4. In these passages the primacy of Christ, in both the sovereignty and the temporal, is explicitly demonstrated. Again, Paul in the proposition of section A' has foreshadowed the issues he intends to address more fully in the letter.

The Reason for the Second Proposition (v.19-20)

The conjunction "because" (ὅτι) serves as a literary device that marks this particular section. The explanation that Christ is the beginning and the firstborn out of the death covers two important issues that focuses on Christ. The first issue is the meaning of, "in him all the fullness pleased to dwell". The phrase "in him" is strongly emphasized since it is put immediately after the particle, "because", instead of after the infinitive, "to dwell". The second issue is the reconciliation of all things through Christ. The strong emphasis is also in "through him" that is placed before the verb, "reconcile". The theme reconciliation is then directed to a very important theme in Christianity, the cross.

Many attempts have been made to examine this profound meaning of "all the fullness" in Paul's thought to the broadest sense.[48] This concept is confirmed by the concept

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[47] O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon: Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 44*, 50.

[48] O'Brien, 51–52.

of fullness in the Old Testament and other Pauline epistles that mainly refer to God's active action of filling until nothing is left. [49] But still the context of Colossians has to be considered. Paul here intends to make known that all of God, not partially, is pleased to dwell in Christ physically. That God is pleased to dwell in Christ physically may seem as the counter of false teachings in Colossians.[50] By referring to the action of God to fill completely in Christ, the implication is that Christ is no less than God. Here Paul has anticipated the issue he desires to address in the context of Colossians (Col. 2:9-10).

The concept of reconciliation is Paul's own. This is evident since the word "reconciliation" occurs nine times in five Pauline epistles.[51] The word "cross" is also familiar to Paul as it occurs nine times in other epistles than Colossians.[52] Also, the word "blood" is not alien to Paul. This issue of reconciliation of all things through Him has gained attention from scholars.[53] Many views have been proposed to understand the meaning of "all things" that also connects to, "whether things on the earth or things in the heavens".[54] The concern of Paul is that the conciliation of all things is made through Christ, and for Christ. This reconciliation is possible by making peace through the blood of the Cross of Christ.

To understand this concept of reconciliation is not to focus on the phrase "all things" or, "things on the earth and things in the heavens". The key to understanding this reconciliation is in the prepositional phrase, "through him". This phrase "through him" has to be understood together with the phrase "in him", the affirmation that Christ is the head, and the proposition that Christ is the firstborn out of death. The unity of all these are important since the focus is on Christ, so the reconciliation will be made possible only if the belief is placed in Christ.

The faith in Christ as the basis for reconciliation fits very well to the historical context of Colossians. Before they converted to Christianity, the Colossians was enemies of God (1:21; 2:13, 20; 3:5-9). The reconciliation is made possible by God through making peace with them by indicating that they are the new creation (1:22; 2:1-6, 10, 12; 3:3), and by nailing all their sins on the cross on which Christ died upon (1:22; 2:11-12, 15, 20; 3:3). This reconciliation is through Him and through faith in Christ (2:22). Paul does not stop to this knowledge and status. The understanding of reconciliation-which in Christ should be manifested practically in the personal life, family, and in relation with others-is emphasized on in Col. 3:4-4:2. Once again, in section A', Paul has shrewdly foreshadowed not only the theme of reconciliation in the letter, but also made this reconciliation as the ground to address the practical issues in Col. 3:4-4:2. Thus misunderstanding the historical context may lead to improper understanding of this important concept of reconciliation.

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[49] See Psalm 72:19; Ezk 43:35; See O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 52. For Pauline epistles, see Rom 15:13; Col. 1:9, 1:25; Eph 1:23; 3:19; When the reference of the fullness is time, the sense is appropriate or necessity as in Gal. 4:4; Logos Bible Software and Bible Works 8 are used for this search.

[50] See n. 34.

[51] Rom. 5:10 (2 times); 1 Cor. 7:11; 2 Cor. 5:18, 5:19, 5:20; Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20, 1:22.

[52] See for instance, 1 Cor. 7:18; Gal 6:12; Eph 2:16; Phil. 3:18.

[53] O'Brien has presented many different views concerning the meaning of "reconcile all things". See O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 53-55.

[54] For a more detailed discussion see O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 53-55.

Application

The conclusion in this passage is that Christ is supreme over all creation, and Christ is the head of the church. This theme is still relevant when we consider our context which in many aspects is still similar. If in Colossians, there are many teachings which are not taught according to Christ, we now also face many teachings that resist Christ as the head over all creation, in both the church and Christian education institutions. In many aspects Christianity is just one out of many religions. Thus, the supremacy of Christ seems unsuitable to all creations. Even among Christians, we may find this principle that Christ is not Lord over all creation but only to Christians.

The supremacy of Christ over all creation is even more relevant in the contemporary reality of life that tends to live with the principle that we are the lord of ourselves. For Christians whether in the church or Christian education institutions, we are aware that the supremacy of Christ has a big influence on how Christians should live. In this day and age, the act of allowing God to be in our personal lives seems to be declining. Even more on the extreme, is that we no longer need God or the suffering Christ. Faith in Christ is no longer understood positively as dependent on the head, but as a restriction to our desire to do what we want to do. The need to control ourselves wisely, as suggested in Colossians, is also a relevant issue to manifest the supremacy of Christ over every aspect of our selves. The competition in negative connotation among Christian churches and Christian education institutions is a very significant context where the supremacy of Christ over his body should be recalled.

An Analysis of Christian Education Perspective

This analysis is focused on every section of the structure: A, B, C, B', and A'. The main point in section A is the supremacy of Christ over all creation. All creation must refer to Creation in the book of Genesis. An important principle for Christian education is the authority of the Bible which starts with the calling of Adam to us as believers to find God's truth. Christian education is important in this context as it is a means to find God's truth[55] in this world through many disciplines of education. The world in all its complexity is orderly created with the word of God, and Jesus as supreme over all creation throughout human history.

In section B, the presence of Christ is before everything. This indicates that Christ is not part of creation; rather He is equal to God, meaning Christ must be the foundation of everything. If Christian education is a means to find God's truth, it must begin with Christ. Christ who is the center id in the whole Bible, which has to be the only foundation for Christian education. Omitting Christ or replacing Christ with merely human morality will of course reduce the goal of Christian education to morality and no longer to the knowledge of God through Christ. It is the person and works of Christ that must be the prominent foundation in the practices of Christian education, and this sole principle cannot be uncompromised.

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[55] Robert W. Pazmino, *Fondasi Pendidikan Kristen: Sebuah Pengantar Dalam Perspektif Injili*, trans. Deny Pranolo and Yanti (Bandung: STT Bandung, 2012), 73.

Section C reaffirms that though everything may seem to be different, they are all actually inseparable; in Christ everything is together as one. In education, we may see so many different fields of study, but they are all whole together and not just related. Although the emphasis of education lies in the intended, systemized and continued attempt to convey and obtain knowledge,[56] we still recognize that there are many fields that seems to be so different and difficult to be related, because of their complexity, but section C reminds us that only and only in Christ, that all these fields are hold together. The consequence is that only through our faith in Christ; one is able to see the harmony and the holding together of all fields in education.

It is clear that it is not the method, instrument, or media of learning that can unite the elements or fields study in education, but it is only Christ, who is a picture of an invisible God, who is able to hold all things together including the complexities of science. Christian education makes a big mistake when omitting Christ as the supreme foundation in its practices. Again, Christian education will only teach the morality to respond to life's complexity. A true Christian education based on the person of Christ must lead to the recognition and knowledge of the true God. The correct understanding of God is a necessity because Christ is the Image of God who is invisible, meaning Christ is the only way to God the Father.

Although part B' emphasizes Christ as the head of the body which is the church and though it seems that it does not speak of education, it must be realized that faith in Christ is comprehensive and integrated. One responsibility of the Christian faith is teaching besides baptizing. Teaching in the broadest sense of human activity is the most important aspect in education and the Christian faith. Christ as head is not only the source of life, but also the source of knowledge to know God, which must be taught.[57] In the context of Christ as the head, we see the correlation between the church and Christian education. The essence of a Christ-centered church, teaching as the head which is the source of church life, should also be at the core of Christian education so that Christ is understood as the foundation and source for the its purpose, which is the knowing of God through faith in Christ.

Finally, section A', emphasizes on the first to rise from the dead which is preceded by the reconciliation that Christ who was crucified on the cross. This section explicitly emphasizes specific references to the person of Christ, namely death and the resurrection. The reconciliation, done through the cross of Christ, should have a very broad impact. In the perspective of Christian education, reconciliation through the cross should enable every educator to see harmony in every field of science through faith in Christ. It is only through Christ who has reconciled all things, that Christian education has foundations to find an integrated and true reconciliation, and not just correlations from various fields of science in education. The reconciliation as a consequence of the cross of Christ shows that the Christian faith does not conflict with all disciplines in education.

The resurrection of Christ from death has important implications in the aspect of Christian education, namely eternity. The resurrection of Christ makes it clear that the product of Christian education is not only limited to life in a mere mortal world. The resurrection of Christ makes eternity a unique element while distinguishing it from

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[56] Thomas A Groome, Pendidikan Agama Kristen: Berbagi Cerita Dan Visi Kita, trans. Daniel Stefanus (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2017), 29.

[57] See Matt. 18:18-20

education in general. The aspect of eternity makes Christian education focus more on the core of human existence, namely the human spirit (spirituality) and not only the body (cognition, affection and psychomotor) in mortality. Eternity is the main basis that results from Christian education, which is piety in Christ whom is born of good spirituality which is based on the truth of God's word that liberates humanity. Thus, piety in Christian education is no longer a mere moral demand, but a manifestation of the responsibility of faith in Christ. Eternity makes Christian education comprehensive because it encompasses two realities of the world, which are mortal and eternal, with eternity being a guide to living in the mortal by being responsible.

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