

Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament · 2. Reihe 77

Clinton E. Arnold

The Colossian Syncretism



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Herausgegeben von
Martin Hengel und Otfried Hofius

77

The
Colossian Syncretism

The Interface Between Christianity
and Folk Belief at Colossae

by

Clinton E. Arnold



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Die Deutsche Bibliothek – CIP-Einheitsaufnahme

Arnold, Clinton E.:

The Colossian syncretism : the interface between Christianity
and folk belief at Colossae / by Clinton E. Arnold. – Tübingen : Mohr, 1995
(Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament : Reihe 2 ;
77)

ISBN 3-16-146435-4 978-3-16-157123-7 Unveränderte eBook-Ausgabe 2019

NE: Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament / 02

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The book was printed and bound by Druck Partner Rübemann in Hemsbach on acid-free paper from Papierfabrik Niefen. Printed in Germany.

ISSN 0340-9570

*To My Parents
Mr. and Mrs. Wayne Arnold*

Acknowledgments

The beginnings of this work reach back to my doctoral study at the University of Aberdeen (Scotland). Although my dissertation focused primarily on the letter to the Ephesians, the seeds of the present study were planted and took root there. Accordingly, I would like to express my appreciation to Professor I. Howard Marshall for his earlier guidance.

Much of the research for this book was carried out in Tübingen during 1991. I am grateful to Biola University for granting me the study leave and also to the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) for a research grant which made the trip to Germany possible. Our time was made particularly enjoyable by the hospitality of some very dear friends: Wilfried and Judith Sturm, Lienhard and Renate Pflaum, and Jürgen and Franziska Schwarz.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to Professor Peter Stuhlmacher for faithfully serving as my “mentor” under the provisions of the ATS grant. I appreciate the many opportunities to discuss the chapters with him and for his numerous insightful comments. I also want to extend my thanks to Professor Robert McL. Wilson (St. Andrews) for reading much of the manuscript and for the opportunity to discuss it with him in his home. I have also benefitted significantly from the remarks of a great number of scholars who commented on portions of this study given as papers in the regional and annual meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature, the Evangelical Theological Society, and seminars in Aberdeen and Tübingen.

I would like to thank Professor Martin Hengel for reading a portion of this manuscript at an early stage and providing helpful feedback. I am grateful that he has now included this work in the WUNT monograph series.

It has been wonderful to serve at Talbot School of Theology with a group of colleagues that are encouraging and supportive friends. I want to express my appreciation to three, in particular, who contributed to me in a variety of ways toward the completion of this project: Dr. Michael J. Wilkins (my Department Chair), Dr. Dennis Dirks (my Dean), and Dr. W. Bingham Hunter (my former Dean). I also want to thank Heather Johnson for her very careful proofreading of this manuscript.

I am exceedingly grateful to my family—my wife, Barbara, and our sons Jeffrey, Dustin, and Brandon—for participating with me in this project through the years. They packed up and moved to Germany for the sake of this project and shared with me in all of the emotional ups and downs of research and writing.

Finally, I dedicate this work to my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Wayne Arnold. I am grateful to my father for imparting to me a sense of vision and perseverance for taking on big projects and seeing them to the end. My mother has always been very supportive of my endeavors, putting up with long periods of separation, and yet providing significant help along the way. Thanks to both of you!

March, 1995
La Mirada, California

Clinton E. Arnold

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Abbreviations

References to classical sources and the associated literature are abbreviated according to N. G. L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard, eds., *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (2d ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1970) and supplemented by H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon* (rev. ed., with Supplement; Oxford: Clarendon, 1978) and the "Notes for Contributors and Abbreviations," in *American Journal of Archaeology* 90 (1986) 381-94. For biblical sources and the associated literature, abbreviations are as listed in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107 (1988) 579-96, with the following additions:

- ARWAW, PC *Abhandlungen der Rheinisch-Westfälischen Akademie der Wissenschaft, Papyrologica Coloniensia*
- Bauer⁶ *Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen Literatur*. 6., völlig neu bearbeitete Auflage. Hrsg. K. Aland & B. Aland. Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1988.
- BCH *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique*
- Conflict *Conflict at Colossae*. Eds. F. O. Francis & W. A. Meeks. SBLSPS 4. Missoula: Scholar's Press, 1973.
- DPL *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Eds. G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin, and D. G. Reid. Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993.
- Encycl. Rel. *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. Ed. M. Eliade. 16 Vols. New York: Macmillan, 1987.
- GGR *Geschichte der Griechischen Religion*. Zweiter Band: Die Hellenistische und Römische Zeit. Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft 5.2. Zweite Auflage. München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1961.
- GMPT *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*. Vol. 1: Texts. Ed. H. D. Betz. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

- HJP*² Emil Schürer. *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*. Revised and edited by Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Martin Goodman. Vol. 3, Part 1. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986.
- IGRR* *Inscriptiones Graecae ad Res Romanas Pertinentes*.
- I.Strat.* *Die Inschriften von Stratonikeia*. Ed. M. Cetin Sahin. 2 Parts. IGSK 21 & 22. Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1981 & 1982.
- JhhÖArchInst* *Jahreshefte des Österreichischen Archäologischen Instituts in Wien*
- JSP* *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha*
- KP* *Der Kleine Pauly*. Lexikon der Antike in fünf Bänden. Hrsg. K. Ziegler & W. Sontheimer. München: Alfred Druckenmüller (Artemis) Verlag, 1979.
- MAMA* *Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiqua*. Ed. W. M. Calder, et al. 8 Vols. London: Longman's, Green & Co., 1928-62.
- SEG* *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*

Introduction

The problem of identifying the precise nature of the teaching and practices of the opponents reflected in Colossians is notorious. There have been intervals in the history of the interpretation of the letter when a consensus appeared to be emerging only to find it fall apart in the next decade based on fresh studies of the letter.

Syncretism is a word that has long been used to characterize the beliefs and practices of the opponents in Colossians. There is clearly some mixture of religious ideas behind this self-styled “philosophy.” The difficulty has been in discerning the nature and extent of the syncretism.¹

For years it appeared that a Gnostic interpretation of the Colossian “philosophy” would prevail. This view was expressed in a variety of ways ranging from pure Gnosticism (E. Lohmeyer), to a Jewish Gnosticism (J. B. Lightfoot; G. Bornkamm; H. Conzelmann; H. -M. Schenke; F. F. Bruce), to a Gnosticism more closely resembling mystery cult beliefs and practice (Dibelius; Lohse). This interpretation has fallen into disfavor, however, based on studies pointing to the later development of the Gnostic religion of redemption and to substantive differences in thought when compared to the teaching of the Colossian opponents. This has led other interpreters to dismiss the “Gnostic” part of the interpretation and stress the correlation with pagan mystery cults (J. Gniska).

More recently a consensus seemed to be surfacing that rooted the deviant teaching at Colossae in Jewish mysticism. This brand of mysticism, it was argued, involved a visionary ascent to heaven for which the adept prepared by rigorous ascetic practices. The initial catalyst for this view was provided through two essays by F. O. Francis. The argument was taken up and developed by C. Rowland, A. T. Lincoln, P. T. O’Brien, R.

¹ The use of the term “syncretism” here and in the title of the book is not intended to prejudice the teaching of the opponents as bad, heretical, or unorthodox (thus, the previous references to “the Colossian heresy,” or “die kolossische Irrlehre”). The designation is descriptive insofar as the competing teaching represents a blending of a variety of religious traditions. Of course, as we will see in the course of this investigation, the author of the letter has significant problems with the particular set of beliefs that combine to form the Colossian “philosophy.”

Yates, and most recently, T. J. Sappington.² This would probably come close to the majority view at present, but many aspects of this view are receiving just criticism.

The idea that the Colossian “philosophy” is best explained by some stream of contemporary philosophical thought has found few supporters. E. Schweizer, an exception, contends that the various strands of evidence about the Colossian teaching point away from Judaism to a world view that he finds dominant in neo-Pythagoreanism. Quite recently, R. DeMaris has argued that the opposing teaching at Colossae is actually best interpreted as an expression of Middle Platonism.³ He has argued effectively that the sources on which Schweizer depends upon as articulations of neo-Pythagoreanism are quite eclectic and are not clear representations of neo-Pythagorean thought. He points rather to the importance of Plutarch and other writers in the Middle Platonic tradition as providing the most appropriate context for interpreting the various strands of evidence in the letter about the Colossian “philosophy.”

Two other scholarly treatments are worthy of special mention because of their stress on local religious traditions. In his 1968 Harvard dissertation, A. T. Kraabel argued that the Colossian teaching has much in common with Anatolian Judaism and what M. P. Nilsson has called “the Lydian-Phrygian mentality” in which the Jews of the region participated.⁴ Kraabel was the first to uncover many of the local religious traditions that seemed to have much in common with the teaching and practice of the Colossian opponents. His treatment of angelic veneration in the area as well as his discussion of the local Judaism seemed to advance the discussion significantly. Unfortunately, his analysis has seldom factored into the discussion on Colossians, probably in part because his study was never published. Three years later, unaware of Kraabel’s work, J. Lähnemann published a major monograph on Colossians in which he characterized the Colossian “philosophy” as a product of Anatolian syncretism.⁵ He claimed that the competing teaching was a form of Christianity with roots in local Phrygian religions (especially the cults of Cybele and Men), an Iranian

² T. J. Sappington, *Revelation and Redemption at Colossae* (JSNTSS 53; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991).

³ R. DeMaris, *The Colossian Controversy* (JSNTSS 96; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994).

⁴ A. T. Kraabel, “Judaism in Asia Minor under the Roman Empire with a Preliminary Study of the Jewish Community at Sardis, Lydia” (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation; Harvard, 1968) 139-54, esp. 141.

⁵ J. Lähnemann, *Der Kolosserbrief. Komposition, Situation und Argumentation* (SNT 3; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1971).

myth of the elements, and hellenized Judaism. Although his analysis of Phrygian Judaism is weak and his appeal to Iranian myth is dubious, his characterization of “the philosophy” as a syncretism involving both pagan and Jewish elements and his emphasis on the distinctively Phrygian features is helpful. Surprisingly, since the publication of these two works no serious studies correlating the local Phrygian religious traditions and Anatolian Judaism to the Colossian “philosophy” have been undertaken.

Of course, quite a variety of other views has been suggested from time to time to take into account the disparate evidence of the letter in reconstructing the teaching of the opponents. It is not our purpose here to provide a history of the research on Colossians; such an endeavor would fill pages. The reader can be brought up to date by the review of the literature in another recent monograph on Colossians.⁶ The intent of this study is to point to some needed revisions in the method of research, to undertake a fresh investigation of the problem, and to suggest a new framework for interpreting the teaching of the opponents. Of course this needs to be carried out in dialogue with the data and conclusions of past research. Thus, the various views of the Colossian “philosophy” will be discussed at the appropriate intervals throughout this volume.

1. Revising the Method

Following the lead of Kraabel and Lähnemann, one of the distinctive methodological traits of this work will be to stress the utilization of local primary evidence whenever possible for the illumination of terms and concepts characteristic of “the philosophy.” Thus, inscriptions and archaeological evidence from Phrygia, Lydia, Caria, and Asia Minor as a whole will be investigated and employed when appropriate. Although there is a limited amount of relevant local evidence, compounded all the more by the fact that the site of Colossae remains unexcavated, there is more local evidence that is relevant to this study than most biblical scholars realize. We will attempt to bring this material to light and consider its significance for understanding the views of the opponents. Especially significant in this regard are the many “angel” inscriptions discovered in Asia Minor, the ἐμβατεύω inscriptions from Claros and Notion, inscrip-

⁶ DeMaris, *Controversy*, 18-40 (= Chapter 2: “History of Scholarship on the Colossian Philosophy”).

tional and literary evidence pertaining to the Judaism of Asia Minor, and the inscriptional and literary evidence illuminating our understanding of local pagan cults (such as the cults of Apollo, Men, *Theos Hypsistos*, Cybele and Attis, et al.).

One of the greatest difficulties for any interpreter attempting to reconstruct the Colossian “philosophy” is discerning the difference between a “catchword” used by the opponents and the author’s polemic (or his own positive theological affirmations). There has been an almost universal recognition in the history of the interpretation of Colossians that the letter writer has quoted words and slogans in use by the advocates of “the philosophy” as part of his polemic. Scholars have also discerned that the author has taken over some of the opponents’ terms and turned these against them by infusing the words with a different meaning. It is more likely that this takes place, however, in the polemical sections of the letter (2:4-8, 16-23) than in other portions of the letter, particularly in the hymn of 1:15-20 and the core theological section of 2:9-15. As I will argue later, this makes it less likely that a term such as *πλήρωμα*, often previously understood to reflect a Gnostic background to the opponents, was a catchword of “the philosophy.”

A final methodological consideration is the criterion of determining what religious/cultural background best explains the pre-Christian religious background of the Colossians and the purveyors of the “philosophy.” Any reconstruction of the teaching and practices of “the philosophy” should be consistent with what we might reasonably expect to surface in this area of Asia Minor. Thus, it is important for us to keep in mind that Colossae was not an important cultural center such as Alexandria, Athens, or Rome. In fact, Colossae was a rather insignificant city in Roman times, eclipsed by its neighbor Laodicea. Most of the people of Colossae would have made their living by raising sheep, by farming crops, or by wool-dyeing. This is certainly not a new criterion, but one that we need to apply more rigorously in an attempt to gain a more accurate appraisal of the situation.

Those arguing for some form of Gnosticism have claimed an advantage here by contending that Gnosticism was a world view that permeated the entire Mediterranean world in the Roman period. This assumption is now seriously questioned in terms of the date of the rise of Gnosticism and in terms of the extent of its sphere of influence.

The current Jewish mystical view also claims this advantage. It is certainly beyond dispute that Jewish communities existed in the Lycus Valley, and it is quite possible that the Colossian church had its beginnings among

Jews and godfearers who looked on Christ as Messiah and Son of God. It is also clear that there are references in Colossians to distinctively Jewish practices that were an integral part of the Colossian “philosophy.” But is there any evidence of some form of communal mysticism in the Judaism of Asia Minor? Qumran is a long way from Phrygia both in distance and in belief and practice.

The recent proposal that the Colossian opponents were a group of Middle Platonists advocating their ideas to the community at Colossae⁷ weakens when faced with this criterion. Is it really plausible that this kind of school philosophy would reach the rural sections of Asia Minor and have the kind of appeal and impact that is presupposed in Colossians?

The thesis of this monograph is that the beliefs and practices of the opponents at Colossae best cohere around the category of what might loosely be called folk religion. In affirming this, I am not intending to establish a commitment to one particular anthropological model of folk belief. Rather, I am suggesting that the best explanation for the Colossian “philosophy” lies in the quite general classification of folk religion. This forces us to think more deeply about what is most likely from the standpoint of the belief structures of common people in Phrygia. As one of the best windows into folk belief, current scholarship has been pointing us in the direction of the so-called magical texts. These clearly represent a dimension of belief held by common people, but reflecting a mixture of religious ideas.

2. The Importance of Reconstructing the Situation

One does not need to grasp the precise contours and details of the teaching and practices of the Colossian “philosophy” to interpret and appreciate much of the theology of the letter. The image of Christ as the exalted Lord of heaven and earth, the presence of salvation for those who believe, and the ethical responsibilities for Christians is equally apprehensible whether one sees the opponents as Gnostics or Jewish mystics.

It is important for us to recognize, however, that Colossians is more than a credal statement or a kind of theological treatise. It is a genuine letter written at a particular point in time to a specific group of people who were faced with the threat of a teaching that was deemed dangerous

⁷ DeMaris, *Controversy*, 131-33.

and deceptive by the author. The letter points to a group of factional teachers who were advocating a certain set of theological beliefs and practices to this Christian community. The primary motivation for the composition of the letter was to oppose this teaching. Without investigating the content of this teaching, we have little idea how this letter corresponds to the reality of the historical situation in the church. Furthermore, we are left in the dark as to how we might interpret many words and lines from the letter that need to be understood in light of the deviant teaching as a whole; for example: θρησκεία τῶν ἀγγέλων, ἃ ἐόρακεν ἐμβατεύων, στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου, philosophy, wisdom, honor, humility, severe treatment of the body, freely-chosen worship, do not handle! do not taste! do not touch! festivals, New Moons, Sabbaths, eating, drinking, and others. Recent Pauline scholarship has rightly emphasized the occasional nature of the letters. As documents of history, they give to us the obligation of interpreting them historically.

Perhaps an even more important reason for attempting a reconstruction of the Colossian controversy is to help us understand why certain developments took place in Paul's thought and why certain features of his theology were emphasized over others. Understanding the setting will help us to grasp the manner of his contextualization of the gospel, that is, the contingent application of his theology to the situation.

3. The Issue of Authorship

When compared with the seven chief letters written by Paul, Colossians exhibits significant theological developments. The issue has long been debated whether the apostle himself was capable of these theological innovations: Does the theology represent the development of his thought (or more mildly, the fresh application of his thought to a new situation) or a later formulation that is inconsistent with what Paul would have said? Without minimizing the uniqueness of the theology of this letter, I have come down on the side of consistency with Pauline thought. It is imperative that one not undervalue the role of the unique and threatening situation facing the Colossian church in catalyzing a fresh application and development of Pauline thought.

It is well known that the author cites hymnic material (esp. 1:15-20), makes ample use of traditional language and imagery, and quotes and alludes to the unique teaching of the syncretistic "philosophy." When one

takes into consideration the Apostle Paul's ability for varied manners of expression, the arguments against the authenticity of the letter based on stylistic matters and *hapax legomena* are somewhat blunted.⁸ This is not to deny that there are some significant differences in style between this letter and the earlier Paulines. The matter is more of a judgment call as to whether Paul was capable of such a style of writing or whether we need to hypothesize another hand behind the letter.⁹

Throughout this volume I will therefore refer to Paul as the author of the letter (in line with a fairly strong stream of scholarship).¹⁰ In doing so, there is nothing in my argument throughout the book that presupposes Paul as the author or depends on this conclusion.

⁸ In spite of the monographs by W. Bujard (*Stilanalytische Untersuchungen zum Kolosserbrief* [SUNT 11; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973]) and M. Kiley (*Colossians as Pseudepigraphy* [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986]), the question of whether Paul was (in)capable of the style of writing and argumentation in Colossians is far from decided. With J. Zmijewski, *Der Stil der paulinische "Narrenrede,"* (BBB 52; Köln/Bonn: Verlag Peter Hanstein, 1978) 37-39, I would fault Bujard's study for relying too much on statistical comparisons, minimizing the dynamic possibilities and individuality of style, and neglecting the theological issues at stake in the letter to the Colossians. See my critique of Kiley's work in *EQ* 60 (1988) 69-71.

⁹ Of course, it is also possible that the style of Colossians reflects the proclivities of a particular amanuensis. See now the study by E. R. Richards, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul* (WUNT 2/42; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck] 1991). Richards aptly notes, "If no attempt is made to determine the secretarial role, then anything apparently 'non-Pauline' could be the secretary's. And if the secretary's, then ultimately it must be Paul's: he permitted it to remain in his letter."

¹⁰ See the various writings of the following scholars who also conclude that Paul is the author: R. P. Martin, N. T. Wright, P. T. O'Brien; J. -N. Aletti ("très probablement de Paul"); P. Benoit; G. Fee; M. D. Hooker; F. F. Bruce; M. Barth; N. Kehl; C. F. D. Moule; J. L. Houlden; W. G. Kümmel; F. W. Beare; W. L. Knox; E. Percy; M. Dibelius; et al.

Part I: The “Worship of Angels”

The phrase “worship of angels” (θρησκεία τῶν ἀγγέλων) in Colossians 2:18 provides one of our most specific clues about the nature of the competing teaching at Colossae. The expression has properly been at the center of the debate, although it has been variously interpreted.

For many years the prevailing interpretation has been that the phrase represents part of the author’s polemic against a Gnostic-oriented cult of angels. In this view, the angels were identified with the *stoicheia* and regarded as the objects of veneration. The angels were then seen either as helpful mediators or as evil beings who could hinder the ascent of the soul on the day of death.¹ Along similar lines, J. B. Lightfoot emphasized an angelolatry, of a Jewish-Gnostic type with strong affinities to Essenism, in which the angels (also called *archai*, *exousiai*, *thronoi*, etc.) function as intermediaries between God and humanity.²

A variety of other opinions has also been expressed. Prior to Lightfoot, J. Eadie argued that the phrase reflected Essene-type Jewish ideas about angels and spirits influenced by local Phrygian beliefs (not Gnosticism).³ He suggested that these Colossian Christians venerated angels as mediators and protectors. He claims, in fact, that the object of the teaching was “to

¹ Martin Dibelius, “The Isis Initiation in Apuleius and Related Initiatory Rites,” in *Conflict*, 84, 89; Dibelius-Greeven, *Kolosser*, 27-29, 35; G. Bornkamm, “The Heresy of Colossians,” in *Conflict*, 130; Hans-Martin Schenke, “Der Widerstreit gnostischer und kirchlicher Christologie im Spiegel des Kolosserbriefes,” *ZTK* 61 (1964) 391-99. He speaks of the phrase as the key point for identifying the heresy as actual Gnosis. For him the phrase refers to a Gnostic cult of the archons, with the archons understood as the rulers of the planetary spheres who demand worship. See also H.-F. Weiss, “Gnostische Motive und antignostische Polemik im Kolosser- und im Epheserbrief,” in *Gnosis und Neues Testament* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1973) 312-14; Lohse, *Colossians*, 118 and Martin, *Colossians* (NCB), 14-15; Gnllka, *Kolosserbrief*, 149-50 (although Gnllka sees a significant Jewish contribution to “the philosophy.”); Pokorný, *Colossians*, 119; et al.

² Lightfoot, *Colossians*, 29-30. He sees the Colossian aberration as consisting of a doctrine of intermediate agencies who were involved in creation and now in the government of the world. The Colossians errorists worshipped these beings as their link to God. Lightfoot, however, did not equate the angels with the *stoicheia*. See also, Moule, *Colossians*, 31-32.

³ Eadie, *Colossians*, 179-82.

secure spiritual protection, by communing with the world of spirits."⁴ E. Schweizer argued that it refers to the practice of offering worship to souls (identified as angels) as they ascend to heaven.⁵ R. DeMaris has recently contended that the passage refers to a devotion to demons or heroes. Some have even seen the phrase as pointing to a rendering of honor to the angels who assisted in the giving of the law and now watch over its observance.⁶

The majority of interpreters in the past decade (especially in Great Britain and North America) have accepted Fred O. Francis' conclusion that angels were not the object of the veneration, but God himself was the unexpressed object of worship by the angels before his heavenly throne.⁷ This explanation then characterizes "the philosophy" as a Jewish mysticism in which the earthly congregation sought to participate in the heavenly angelic liturgy, i.e. by worshipping *with* the angels. Accordingly, Francis argued that the genitive expression τῶν ἀγγέλων should be understood as the subject of the action of worship (θρησκεία). This interpretation, as I will argue below, falls short both on grammatical grounds and in terms of its inability to account for all the facets of "the philosophy" as revealed in Colossians.

In an insightful but neglected article written shortly after the turn of the century, A. L. Williams suggested that the phrase points to an angelolatry (a worship of the angels = objective genitive), but a type of angelic veneration that had its roots in the fringes of Judaism.⁸ Specifically, he contends that "there is almost no evidence for the worship of them [angels]

⁴ Eadie, *Colossians*, xxxiii.

⁵ Schweizer, *Colossians*, 131-33, 160.

⁶ E. Percy, *Die Probleme der Kolosser- und Epheserbriefe* (Lund: Gleerup, 1964) 168; S. Lyonnet, "Paul's Adversaries in Colossae," in *Conflict*, 149-50.

⁷ Fred O Francis, "Humility and Angelic Worship in Col 2:18," in *Conflict*, 177. He has been followed in this interpretation by: T. J. Sappington, *Revelation and Redemption at Colossae* (JSNTSS 53; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991) 158-64; J. Sumney, "Those Who 'Pass Judgment': The Identity of the Opponents in Colossians," *Bib* 74 (1993) 377-78; W. Carr, *Angels and Principalities* (SNTSMS 42; Cambridge: University Press, 1981) 69-72; "Two Notes on Colossians," *JTS* 24 (1973) 499, 500; O'Brien, *Colossians*, 143; R. Yates, "'The Worship of Angels' (Col. 2:18)," *ET* (1987) 12-15; C. Rowland, "Apocalyptic Visions and the Exaltation of Christ in the Letter to the Colossians," *JSNT* 19 (1983) 73-83; C. A. Evans, "The Colossian Mystics," *Biblica* 63 (1982) 188-205; A. T. Lincoln, *Paradise Now and Not Yet* (SNTSMS 43; Cambridge: University Press, 1981) 111-12; L. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) 32-33. Hurtado comments, "I am not aware of a refutation of Francis, and in view of his work citation of Col. 2:18 as evidence of a first-century Jewish cult of angels must be considered a misinterpretation of the passage."

⁸ A. Lukyn Williams, "The Cult of the Angels at Colossae," *JTS* 10 (1909) 413-38.

being recognized in early times by thoughtful Jews, save indeed in connexion with exorcism and magic."⁹ He argues that local religious influences would have reinforced this attitude toward angels and, consequently, was adopted by some of the Colossian Christians. For Williams, the essence of the problem at Colossae stems from Jewish influences, albeit a syncretistic Judaism—with an affinity of type to Essenism (as Eadie and Lightfoot suggested)—but also betraying Phrygian, Persian, and Syrian characteristics, especially of a magical character.

Although there are some significant weaknesses in Williams' presentation when seen as a whole,¹⁰ I am convinced that the heart of his thesis is correct. The "worship of angels" in Colossians 2:18 refers essentially to a magical invocation of angels, especially for apotropaic purposes. In the following pages, I will attempt to substantiate and develop this claim by building on the foundation already laid by Williams. Surprisingly, Williams reached this conclusion without ever referring to the magical papyri, the amulets, and the lead curse tablets. This material, especially that of a Jewish character, significantly strengthens his central idea. Perhaps most importantly, no previous work has sought to collect all the information about local (Phrygian and Carian) attitudes about "angels." A surprising amount of material is forthcoming from the inscriptions of Asia Minor that illuminates local beliefs about angelic mediation.

This section will serve not only to interpret the phrase "worship of angels," but will help to set "the philosophy" into the milieu of a magical understanding of spirituality and human existence, namely, the domain of folk belief. In the process of describing how the ancients would call on angels, divine mediators, and supernatural assistants, many other facets of the teaching of the opponents at Colossae will be exposed.

⁹ Williams, "Cult," 432.

¹⁰ For example: (1) he speaks of a "cult" of angels, but he does not clarify what he means by a cultic context of veneration and ends up with an idea that sounds more like a private invocation of angels; (2) the foregoing observation also points to an inadequate analysis of the meaning of the term *θηροσκεία*; (3) he does not compare and discuss his understanding of the use of the term "angels" in Col. 2:18 with the occurrences of *στοιχεῖα* in Col. 2:8, 20 nor with the *ἀρχαὶ καὶ ἐξουσίαι* in Col. 1:16; 2:10, 15.

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