

GEORGE H. VAN KOOTEN

Cosmic Christology  
in Paul and the  
Pauline School

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen  
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*

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Mohr Siebeck

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George H. van Kooten

# Cosmic Christology in Paul and the Pauline School

Colossians and Ephesians  
in the Context of Graeco-Roman Cosmology,  
with a New Synopsis of the Greek Texts

Mohr Siebeck

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## Preface

This book is the revised form of a Ph.D. thesis submitted at the University of Leiden (2001). I am grateful to the Council for the Humanities, part of the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO), for my appointment as a junior researcher during the years 1996–2000.

Preparatory research already started during my postgraduate studies at the University of Durham (1994–1995). When I came to Durham to study Pauline theology with Prof. James Dunn, Prof. Dunn was about to finish his commentary on the *Letter to the Colossians* (Dunn 1996). He suggested I should draw up a new synopsis of the Greek texts of the letters to the Colossians and the Ephesians as a precursor to further studies into the theologies of these letters. His deep insight into Pauline issues, his rapidity of mind, and warm interest were and remain a great stimulus.

This book also owes much to Prof. Martin Goodman, with whom I studied at the Oriental Institute of the University of Oxford (1995–1996). More than anyone else he helped me to overcome the Judaism/Hellenism divide, and urged me to give as much thought as possible to sources from the pre-500 AD period to avoid anachronistic pitfalls.

I wish to thank Prof. Henk-Jan de Jonge, my supervisor at the University of Leiden, for his unfaltering guidance and support during my studies, both at the undergraduate and postgraduate level, and for his continuous urge for unambiguous comprehensibility. I am grateful to him and the other members of staff, Dr Johannes Tromp and Dr Harm Hollander, for many energetic and valuable debates on the issues of this book.

Furthermore, I wish to express my gratitude to Prof. Michael Frede (Oxford) for his willingness to discuss various aspects of the ancient philosophical side of this book and for many important suggestions which opened up new perspectives. His view that ‘Christianity (...) [is] a thoroughly ancient phenomenon, one without which antiquity would not be fully understood, and one which would not be fully understood, at least historically, without understanding its origins in antiquity’ (Frede 1999a, p. 45) is a challenge for more interdisciplinary cooperation in this field.

Dr Maria Sherwood-Smith (Leiden), fellow-member of The House, was so kind as to check the English of this book. Naturally, all flaws and errors remain mine.

Last but not least, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Dr h.c. Georg Siebeck, publisher, Prof. Jörg Frey, series editor, and Dr Henning Ziebritzki, editor, for accepting this study in their WUNT series, seeing it through to publication, and making it available for scholarly discussion.

Groningen, May 2003

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*Aber auch wenn wir von der johanneischen Frage absehen, so sind doch in der älteren Zeit Elemente genug vorhanden, deren Beachtung zu demselben Ergebnisse führt wie (...) das Paar der Briefe an die Ephesier und Kolosser. Aber auch Paulus selbst kommt hier in Betracht, dessen Christologie doch jedenfalls mit der kosmischen Stellung, welche sie der Person Christi gibt, eine Linie eröffnet, auf deren gerader Fortsetzung die Logosspekulation liegt. Mit anderen Worten, die Einführung der Philosophie in das Christentum erscheint nicht als die Neuerung der Apologeten, welche nur an der Gnosis ihren Vorläufer hat; sie ist schon in einer viel früheren Zeit angebahnt.*

C. Weizsäcker, Review of A. Harnack's *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* (Freiburg 1886, vol. 1), in: *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen*, October 15th, 1886, no. 21, pp. 821—831; quotation from p. 829.

*... christological thinking between 50 and 100 CE was much more unified in its basic structure than New Testament research, in part at least, has maintained. (...) more happened in the first twenty years than in the entire later, centuries-long development of dogma.*

Martin Hengel, *Studies in Early Christology*, Edinburgh 1995, p. 383.

*Fundamental is the eschatological claim that with Christ's death a whole epoch has passed and a new age begun. Moreover, this new age is characterized by the steady reclaiming of individuals for an ever closer conformity to the risen Christ. In some sense the event of Christ's passion and resurrection has to be reenacted in believers until the renewal of the new age is complete. Not only so, but the process cannot, almost by definition, be something merely individual or individualistic. Rather, by its very nature it is a shared experience which involves creation as well. The 'with Christ' cannot be fully enacted except as a 'with others' and 'with creation.' (...) the language cannot be reduced simply to a description of baptism or of membership in the believing community. Paul's language indicates rather a quite profound sense of participation with others in a great and cosmic movement of God centred on Christ and effected through his Spirit.*

James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, Edinburgh 1998, pp. 403—404.



## Introduction

This study is concerned with Pauline views on the interrelationship between God, Christ, and the cosmos. It relates these views to contemporary Graeco-Roman theology and cosmology. The interrelationship between God, Christ, and the cosmos may also be termed cosmic Christology as Christ is accorded a cosmic role in God's dealings with the cosmos. Sometimes, the cosmology and cosmological concerns which come to expression in this cosmic Christology may also justify calling it christological cosmology rather than just cosmic Christology. No matter how one looks at it, God, Christ, and the cosmos seem to be closely intertwined in Pauline thought.

This way of thinking comes to the fore not only in some of Paul's authentic letters, but particularly in the Pseudo-Pauline letters to the Colossians and the Ephesians. I consider these letters as constituents of a Pauline debate on God, Christ, and the cosmos because, as I will aim to demonstrate in this book, the author of the *Letter to the Colossians* (*Col*) deliberately took issue with certain aspects of Paul's cosmic Christology (chaps 2.2.5 and 3). The author of the *Letter to the Ephesians* (*Eph*), in turn, continued this debate by drawing on *Col* and commenting on some features of its Christology and cosmology (chap. 4). It seems that both authors pursued this debate from theological and cosmological positions which they shared, to some extent, with Graeco-Roman contemporaries. Paul had opened up the possibility of such a debate in terms of Graeco-Roman cosmology, as he held the widespread opinion that the cosmos is composed of elements (chap. 2.1). Paul had also played a pivotal role in opening up an important aspect of Jewish eschatology to the Graeco-Roman mind by conceiving of the figure of the heavenly eschatological agent as a being which is engaged in the subjugation of chaotic and obstinate cosmic principles and forces (chap. 2.2).

In this introduction, I shall first briefly introduce the letters to the Colossians and the Ephesians with regard to their addressees and date before commenting on their relationship. This relationship is somewhat obscure as a result of the complex manner in which the author of *Eph* is dependent on *Col*. The *Letter to the Colossians* is purportedly addressed to the Christian congregation at Colossae in the Roman province of Asia. Colossae is close to the region of Caria in southwest Asia Minor and is situated in the southwestern part of the ill-defined region of Phrygia.<sup>1</sup> Colossae was eas-

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<sup>1</sup> On Phrygia, see Mitchell 1996.

ily accessible from Ephesus, the economic and administrative centre of provincial Asia, as it was situated on the Eastern Highway which led from Ephesus to the East, just over one hundred miles (i.e. 160 kilometres) to the east of Ephesus.<sup>2</sup> As I shall argue in due course, the *Letter to the Colossians* was probably written in the 80s AD at the earliest (chap. 2.2.5).

The *Letter to the Ephesians*, however, does not seem ever to have been addressed to the Christian congregation at Ephesus. The reading of Ephesus in the letter's address is probably corrupt. In this study, I shall suggest that the letter was addressed, although only purportedly, to Laodicea-Lycus (chap. 4.8). This city was on the same direct line of the Eastern Highway as Colossae, only approximately ten miles (16 kilometres) further west of Colossae in the direction of Ephesus.<sup>3</sup> The favourable location of Laodicea and Colossae on the Eastern Highway made both cities very attractive geographical points of reference for someone producing pseudepigraphic literature.

Although the present *Letter to the Ephesians* was, in my view, originally addressed to the Laodiceans, I will continue to call it by its common name. The *Letter to the Ephesians*, is—as I shall recall in the introduction to chap. 1—generally, and rightly, regarded to be dependent on the *Letter to the Colossians* and must therefore have been composed after *Col* in the 80s AD or later. As it is doubtful whether the so-called apostolic fathers like Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch were acquainted with *Eph*, the first firm evidence for the existence of *Eph* seems to derive from Marcion (fl. c. AD 140), who knew *Eph* as the *Letter to the Laodiceans* (see chap. 4.8), Tertullian (c. AD 160—240; see chap. 4.8), and Basilides (fl. AD 130—140).<sup>4</sup> For that reason, the date of *Eph* ranges somewhere between the 80s and AD 140. A date in the first two decades following the

<sup>2</sup> On the geographical position of Colossae and the Eastern Highway, see Ramsay 1895, vol. 1, chap. 6.1, pp. 208—211 and chap. 6.6, pp. 217—219. For a classical map of Asia Minor, which makes it possible to measure the distance between Ephesus and Colossae, see Calder and Bean 1958 and Talbert 2000 (see bibliography, section 2.5). For the situation of Colossae near modern Honaz, see Bean 1971, pp. 257—259, with a map on p. 233.

<sup>3</sup> On the geographical situation of Laodicea, see Ramsay 1895, vol. 1, chap. 2.2, pp. 35—37. Cf. also Bean 1971, pp. 247—257, with a plan of Laodicea on p. 252, showing the Eastern Highway which enters Laodicea by the 'Ephesian Gate' (A) and issues forth by the 'Syrian Gate' (C) in the direction of Colossae (see also Ramsay's description in Ramsay 1895, vol. 1, p. 35, with a map between pp. 34 and 35). See also Bean 1976. For the distance between Laodicea and Colossae, see again Calder and Bean 1958 and Talbert 2000 (bibliography, section 2.5).

<sup>4</sup> See Lincoln 1990, pp. LXXII—LXXIII and Lindemann 1979, pp. 199—221, esp. pp. 204—205, 215 and 220. For Basilides' acquaintance with *Eph*, see the reports in Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* (see index locorum in ed. Marcovich, p. 424). I owe this reference to Basilides to Prof. A.P. Bos, Amsterdam.

composition of *Col* in the 80s AD is to be preferred, since the unpolemical way in which *Eph* exhibits a positive view on God and creation seems to antedate the beginnings of Gnosticism after AD 100.<sup>5</sup>

The obscure nature of the relationship between *Eph* and *Col* and, in connection with that, the reasons why *Eph* was written constituted the starting point of my research. As recently as 1987, in his overview of the modern scholarly discussion on *Eph*, Merkel reiterated earlier observations of others that the literary and historical problems to which *Eph* exposes its interpreters have not been overcome.<sup>6</sup> Though it is generally accepted that the author of *Eph* is dependent on *Col*, neither the exact nature of this dependency nor the reasons why the author of *Eph* chose to make use of *Col* have been satisfactorily determined so far. The synopses of the Greek texts of both letters, compiled by Goodspeed (1933), Wagenführer (1941), Mitten (1951), Reuter (1997) and Vleugels (1997), have proved far from sufficient for clarifying the genetic development of *Eph* out of *Col*. For that reason, my whole study is based on a new, extensive synopsis which I have drawn up and which is included in appendix II, together with a review of all previous synopses and a description of the characteristics of the present synopsis in appendix I. This synopsis contains the Greek texts of *Eph* and *Col*, as well as those Greek passages in Paul and the Septuagint on which the author of *Eph* also draws.

This literary-critical approach to the relationship between *Eph* and *Col* is complemented with a historical enquiry into the context of contemporary Graeco-Roman cosmology which I believe to shed considerable light on several important issues in *Eph* and *Col*. In this I continue the line of research set out by scholars like Eduard Schweizer, DeMaris, Dupont and, recently, Schwindt. Unlike these scholars, however, I intend to integrate research into *Col* and *Eph*: in many studies Schweizer focused solely on *Col* and left *Eph* out,<sup>7</sup> DeMaris' critical update of Schweizer's view on *Col* is likewise only concerned with *Col*,<sup>8</sup> whereas Dupont's *Gnosis* contains valuable sections on important motifs in *Eph* but lacks a comparative treatment of *Eph* and *Col*.<sup>9</sup> Schwindt offers a convincing interpretation of *Eph* in terms of Graeco-Roman cosmology, yet does not show how this material has a bearing upon *Col* and on the interrelationship between *Eph* and *Col*.<sup>10</sup> Unlike Schweizer and DeMaris, I shall not only characterise the

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Schwindt 2002, chap. 4.5.3, esp. pp. 503—505 and 508.

<sup>6</sup> Merkel 1987, p. 3157.

<sup>7</sup> Schweizer 1970, 1975, 1988, 1989a and 1989b.

<sup>8</sup> DeMaris 1994.

<sup>9</sup> Dupont 1949.

<sup>10</sup> Schwindt 2002, esp. chaps 3 (ancient cosmology) and 4 (*Eph*).

philosophy which is criticised in *Col* as Middle Platonist, as they do,<sup>11</sup> but also detect many Middle Platonist motifs and overtones in the theology and cosmology of the author of *Col* himself, alongside notions which are more particularly Stoic.

As a whole, this book aims to do justice to the importance of the cosmological side of early Christian theology and Christology. Cosmological interest is not only noticeable in the Pseudo-Pauline letters to the Colossians and the Ephesians, but—as I shall show in chap. 2—already in Paul. In these letters, whether authentically Pauline or pseudepigraphic, Graeco-Roman cosmology is closely intertwined with the soteriological question of man’s salvation. In this, I disagree with scholars like MacMullen and Carr. In his *Christianizing the Roman Empire*, MacMullen says that the most conspicuous difference between Christianity and Graeco-Roman culture was Paul’s Jewish stress on the ‘antagonism of God toward all other supernatural powers’ whereas classical culture—and here MacMullen quotes Carr with much approval—‘lacked any sense of mighty, hostile forces that stood over against man as he struggled for survival.’<sup>12</sup>

Carr’s opinion is recorded at length in his *Angels and Principalities: The Background, Meaning and Development of the Pauline Phrase *hai Archai kai hai Exousiai**,<sup>13</sup> which—as far as its object of research is concerned—provides the closest analogy to the research which I undertake in the present book. Carr’s view on the identity of Paul’s forces and the supposed absence of such forces in contemporary Graeco-Roman thought seems untenable, however. In my view, the powers Christ is thought to be confronted with in Pauline and Pseudo-Pauline letters are in fact *similar* to those antagonistic cosmological powers which—according to Plutarch—are subjugated by Eros, Aphrodite and Osiris (chap. 3.2). As soon as Paul reckoned with the reality of the elements of the cosmos ( $\sigma\tau\omega\chi\eta\alpha\tau\omega\kappa\sigma\mu\nu$ ) in his *Letter to the Galatians*, he took over the whole Graeco-Roman view of the sublunar cosmos as the realm in which the passive elements are subject to a destructive cosmic force (chaps 2.1 and 3.2). As far as cosmological concepts and terminology are concerned, there are many similarities between Pauline Christianity and Graeco-Roman cosmological philosophy. The importance of cosmic Christology

<sup>11</sup> Schweizer himself used the term ‘Pythagorean’ (see, e.g., Schweizer 1989a, pp. 103–104), but after DeMaris had demonstrated that ‘Middle Platonist’ is a more appropriate characterisation (DeMaris 1994, pp. 88–97 and chap. 4, pp. 98–133), Schweizer showed himself more or less convinced (Schweizer 1995): ‘Richtig ist, daß ich “Pythagoreer” (...) immer in Anführungszeichen hätte schreiben sollen, da mir (...) mittelplatonischer Einfluß natürlich deutlich war’ (Schweizer 1995, col. 240). See also Sterling 1998.

<sup>12</sup> MacMullen 1984, pp. 18–19 and 130 note 8; Carr 1981, p. 174.

<sup>13</sup> Carr 1981.

and cosmology in Paul and in the Pseudo-Pauline letters to the Colossians and the Ephesians is reflected in the genuine efforts made by the authors of *Col* and *Eph* to adapt Paul's view on God, Christ, and the cosmos to their own temporal and intellectual circumstances.

The interest of early Christians in cosmology did not wane, but rather increased. Physics continued to concern Christians throughout the second and third centuries AD and after. Physics even occasioned the Marcionite or Gnostic crisis in the middle of the second century, far ahead of all more specifically christological and Trinitarian issues which were decided at the great councils of the fourth and fifth centuries. The Gnostic movement, as is now increasingly acknowledged, is closely related to the history of Graeco-Roman philosophy.<sup>14</sup> This movement is, as Dillon puts it, part of the 'Platonic underworld,' in which category he includes, among others, the Gnostic writings which he considers to reflect a particular type of Platonism.<sup>15</sup> The emergence of Gnosticism becomes more understandable, as Mansfeld has shown, if it is understood as involving the radicalisation of a concept that had never really been adopted in Graeco-Roman philosophy but had largely remained only a logical possibility: the concept of a bad or ignorant Demiurge (Creator).<sup>16</sup> Inasmuch as Gnosticism is a particular, though radical variation on Graeco-Roman philosophy, one can detect many similarities between Gnosticism and the letters to the Colossians and the Ephesians. Yet, these similarities are only due to their common background in Graeco-Roman philosophy. The dissimilarities between Gnostic views on the cosmos on the one hand, and those of *Col* and *Eph* on the other spring easily to mind if one looks at the interpretation of these letters by Gnostics, who have embraced the notion of a bad or ignorant Demiurge.<sup>17</sup> This notion is certainly absent from *Col* and *Eph*. For that reason, the scholarly interpretation of *Col* and *Eph* in terms of Gnosticism has to be abandoned,<sup>18</sup> and due attention should be paid to general Graeco-Roman cosmology as the immediate contemporary context of *Col* and *Eph*.

In this study, I shall proceed as follows. In the first chapter, I will start off by introducing *Col*, the first of the two Pseudo-Pauline letters at issue. Attention will first be drawn to the fact that in its warnings against a particular philosophy, the concept of body (σῶμα) plays a pivotal role (chap. 1.1). On closer inspection, the term 'body' (σῶμα) appears to stand for the

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., Roukema 1999, esp. chaps 7 and 9.

<sup>15</sup> Dillon 1996a, chap. 8A, pp. 384—396. See also Dillon 1996b.

<sup>16</sup> Mansfeld 1981, esp. pp. 312—314.

<sup>17</sup> See the evidence of the Gnostic interpretation of Paul collected in Pagels 1975.

<sup>18</sup> For an overview of this Gnostic interpretation, see Merkel 1987, chap. 2.1, pp. 3176—3195.

body of the cosmos, and a discussion of contemporary Stoic and Middle Platonist views on the cosmic body and its coherence becomes indispensable (chap. 1.2).

Having introduced *Col* and highlighted its interest in cosmic coherence, I shall try to account for the distinctiveness of the cosmology of *Col* by comparing it with the cosmology of Paul's authentic writings. In the second chapter, the way is paved for such a comparison. To this end, some important cosmological terms are discussed which occur in both cosmological systems. These terms are 'elements of the cosmos' (*στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου*), 'principles' (*ἀρχαί*) and 'powers' (*ἐξουσίαι*) which occur not only in *Col*, but also already in Paul's letters to the Galatians and the Corinthians. In chap. 2.1, I focus on the idea that Christ came down to lift man's bondage to the 'elements of the cosmos' (*Gal* 4.3—10). In chap. 2.2, the notion is discussed that between his resurrection and the end of time, Christ is engaged in subjugating the cosmic 'principles' and 'powers' (*1 Cor* 15.23—28). It seems that already Paul's Christology is highly cosmological in nature and has much in common with contemporary Graeco-Roman thought. On the other hand, however, Paul's expectation of a gradual and imminent disappearance of the cosmos and its powers as a result of Christ's activities appears to be in marked contrast with the stability and coherence which the author of *Col* attributes to the *present* cosmos (chap. 2.2.5).

The third chapter develops this comparison between Paul and the author of *Colossians* further, and in it I comment in detail on the latter's view on the principles, powers and elements of the cosmos. This view is expressed in the introductory prayer at the beginning of *Col* and in the central part of the letter in which the so-called Colossian philosophy is refuted. First the introductory prayer will be dealt with (chap. 3.1), and this will be followed by a treatment of the letter's central part (chap. 3.2). Finally, I shall address the issue of the identity of the Colossian philosophy to which the author of *Col* is opposed (chap. 3.3).

Once a clear picture has emerged of the cosmic Christologies of Paul and of the author of *Col*, it will prove possible to understand the characteristics of the cosmic Christology of *Eph* as well. In the fourth chapter, I will demonstrate that the author of *Eph* is literally dependent on *Col*, adopted almost its entire structure, but modified its cosmological tenets. My arguments in this chapter are largely based on the new synopsis of the Greek texts of *Eph* and *Col* which is contained in the second appendix, together with a critique of all previous synopses and a full explanation of the present synopsis in the first appendix. These appendixes are meant to promote a genetic interpretation of *Eph*, i.e. an interpretation in terms of its development out of *Col*.

At the end of this introduction, a few disclaimers apply with respect to the following chapters. First, if I use the term ‘church’ (*ἐκκλησία*) in this book, most frequently in chap. 4, I do so only reluctantly because at the beginning of Christianity the word did not yet have the specifically Christian ring to it which it acquired later. As is apparent from a footnote at the end of chap. 1.2.4, Plutarch, a contemporary of the author of *Eph*, used the word *ἐκκλησία*, like all Greeks, in the sense of an ‘assembly of people’ (*De defectu oraculorum* 426A). It is in that general sense that the term ‘church’ should be understood.

Secondly, for ease of reference I use the term ‘Septuagint’ in a broad sense as an equivalent of the Jewish Scriptures in Greek, even if the texts quoted or alluded to in Paul, *Col* or *Eph* were not yet part of the integrated body of writings which is now designated as the Septuagint.

Thirdly, the labels which I attach to some philosophical notions, such as ‘Stoic’ or ‘Middle Platonist,’ have to be taken with some caution because, as Frede has recently pointed out in his epilogue to *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*, clear contours are absent in the philosophy pursued in the period between 125 BC and 250 AD.<sup>19</sup>

Fourthly, for the sake of historical transparency I usually add the biographical dates of classical authors in brackets behind their name. These dates have on the whole been derived from the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (*OCD*<sup>3</sup>), though the need to be brief sometimes coerces me to simplify its nuances.

Finally, in calling *Col* and *Eph* Pseudo-Pauline letters, rather than Deutero-Pauline letters, I follow the practice, current among classicists, of prefacing the names of pseudepigraphic authors with the prefix ‘Pseudo-.’

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<sup>19</sup> Frede 1999b, pp. 790—793.



## Chapter 1

# The Body of the Cosmos and its Coherence according to the *Letter to the Colossians*: Early Christian Thought in the Context of Contemporary Stoic and Middle Platonist Physics

## Introduction

It is the assumption of this study, which will be ascertained in due course, that Paul's *Letter to the Colossians* and *Letter to the Ephesians* are in fact examples of the phenomenon of pseudepigraphic literature, which was widespread in classical antiquity.<sup>1</sup> A striking feature of these letters is that they seem to have been written by two distinct adherents of Pauline theology, both of whom credited their writings to Paul, while at the same time one of them was dependent on the other. Generally, *Eph* is thought to be secondary and to share many of its tenets with *Col*, the writing it was modelled on. The two pseudepigraphic writings resemble one another in many respects, but the secondary one also diverges to some extent from its model, and the question of how to account for both similarity and divergence remains puzzling till the present day.

There seems, however, to be a way out of this problem. In previous research into these letters, the relationship between the contents of these letters and the cosmological debate conducted within the religious philosophy of the Graeco-Roman period has not received the attention it deserves. Recently, James D.G. Dunn drew attention to the concept of body (*σῶμα*) in *Col* and showed the large semantic variety of this concept here, including the meaning of *σῶμα* as the body of the cosmos.<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, I aim to demonstrate that such a cosmological use of *σῶμα* ('body') characterizes a passage in *Col* which is devoted entirely to an analysis and refutation of a rival doctrine about the *στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου*, the elements of the cosmos (*Col* 2.8—3.4). The cosmological use of *σῶμα* ('body'),

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<sup>1</sup> On pseudepigraphic literature in classical antiquity, see Rose and Parsons 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Dunn 1994, esp. 3rd section, pp. 173—177 on the cosmic body.

however, seems to disappear, as I wish to argue later, in the parallel passages in *Eph.* This disappearance might shed light on the interrelation between *Col* and *Eph*, and on the purpose of the latter.

This approach to the interrelation of these letters was already suggested by Martin Dibelius in the 1927 edition of his commentary on *Col* but seems to remain either neglected or unjustifiably criticized. According to Dibelius, the term 'body' (*σώμα*) in *Col* 2.19 should be understood as referring to the body of the cosmos. Interpreting this concept as a reference to the body of the church, as the parallel but secondary passage in *Eph* does (*Eph* 4.16), amounts to imposing the meaning of *Eph* 4.16 on *Col* 2.19.<sup>3</sup> In this chapter, I intend to provide fresh evidence for the cosmological meaning of *σώμα* ('body') in *Col* and to supplement the appropriate religio-historical background of this concept which Dibelius' interpretation was still lacking.<sup>4</sup> Knowledge of contemporary cosmology can contribute significantly towards the clarification of the enigmatic relationship between *Eph* and *Col*.

This argument will be developed over several stages. First, it will be argued that the term *σώμα* ('body') is *central* to the section which deals with the disputed doctrine about the elements of the cosmos in *Col* 2.8—3.4 (chap. 1.1). Secondly, attention will be given to the cosmological meaning of the term *σώμα* ('body') in this passage. This meaning clearly arises against the interpretative background of contemporary physics as developed in Stoicism and Middle Platonism (chap. 1.2). On the basis of this detailed discussion of the concept of *σώμα* ('body') in the central section in *Col*, in one of the subsequent chapters a comparison can be drawn with *Eph*, where this terminology reappears but loses its cosmological meaning (see chap. 4.6.3).

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<sup>3</sup> Dibelius 1953<sup>3</sup>, pp. 36—37 on *σώμα* in *Col* 2.19: 'Bei der Zurückdrängung der kosmischen Gedanken in der Kirche ist es beinahe selbstverständlich, daß Ausleger wie Theodoret [=Theodoret of Cyrrhus, c. 393—466 AD] die Stelle einfach nach Eph 4,16 deuten' (p. 36; =Dibelius 1927<sup>2</sup>, p.27; not yet in Dibelius 1912<sup>1</sup>). On the secondary nature of *Eph*, see Dibelius 1953<sup>3</sup>, pp. 83—85 (cf. Dibelius 1927<sup>2</sup>, pp. 63—65 and Dibelius 1912<sup>1</sup>, pp. 113—114).

<sup>4</sup> Dibelius 1953<sup>3</sup>, pp. 29—30: 'Aber sichere Belege für die religionsgeschichtlichen Zusammenhänge fehlen; wir können nur den kosmischen Gebrauch von κεφαλή und σώμα (2,19) konstatieren' (p. 30; =Dibelius 1927<sup>2</sup>, p. 22; not yet in Dibelius 1912<sup>1</sup>).

# Indexes

- 1 Index of Passages from Ancient Authors
- 2 Index of Modern Authors
- 3 Index of Subjects and Selected Ancient Names

## 1 Index of Passages from Ancient Authors

Some short passages of *Col* and *Eph* are included under a larger unit if this is dealt with specifically and extensively in a separate chapter section, which is then mentioned between brackets. For example, *Eph* 3.10 is listed separately, but some references are included under *Eph* 3.1—21, which is treated extensively in a separate chapter section, chap. 4.5.

All sections of the index, including the section with biblical references, are arranged in alphabetical order.

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### 1.1 Biblical references

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