

The Redaction of Colossians in Ephesians: Still a Credible Theory?

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Introduction

The remarkable amount of common material found in Colossians and Ephesians, as well as the identical order of appearance in the respective epistles, suggests some form of literary relationship between them.¹ This has given rise to a number of contrasting yet interrelated theories² touching upon the provenance, authorship, and relative

¹ C.L. Mitton, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), 12, finds the similarities "exceedingly close and curiously intricate." Figuring conservatively, he has found 25% of Ephesians to be taken from Colossians: this common material makes up 34% of the Colossian text.

² Ernest Percy, *Die Probleme der Kolosser- und Epheserbriefe* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1946), and A. Van Roon, *The Authenticity of Ephesians*, ed. W. C. van Unnik, *Supplements to Novum Testamentum*, vol. 39 (Leiden: Brill, 1974). Both longer studies, they analyse the interrelated elements of authorship and priority, which Merklein, *Das Kirchliche Amt nach den*

priority of the letters. As early as the 19th century, the priority of Colossians (and the literary dependence of Ephesians upon the older, Colossian template) had become an assumption among the majority of critical scholars,³ as in our day.⁴ C.L. Mitton's discussion represents the fullest modern expression of Col.-Eph. scheme of dependence, and comprises the following elements:

- (1.) The priority of Col. is an almost universally accepted conclusion; previous attempts to argue Ephesian priority rely on a "very debatable hypothesis";⁵
- (2.) The development in theology between the letters is best explained in terms of Eph. redaction;⁶
- (3.) Ephesians evidences "improvements" over Colossians;⁷
- (4.) Ephesians generalizes the particular concerns of Colossians;
- (5.) Ephesians "conflates" passages from Colossians.

Mitton, primarily concerned with the question of authorship of Eph., rests his case for Col. priority with this observation: "Each of these five

Epheserbrief, Studien zum Alten und Neuen Testament (München: Kösel-Verlag, 1973), 35, characterizes as "indissolubly bound together." For a good overview of more recent scholarship, see J. B. Polhill, "The Relationship between Ephesians and Colossians," *Review and Expositor* 70 (1973): 439-50.

³ H. J. Holtzmann, *Kritik der Epheser- und Kolosserbriefe auf Grund einer Analyse ihres Verwandtschaftsverhältnisses* (Leipzig: Wilhelm Engelmann, 1872), 32. Holtzmann notes that the dependence of Ephesians has been merely assumed; his study, in contrast, intends to take critical questions "aus der Sphäre des Behaupteten in diejenige des Bewiesenen."

⁴ A sampling of scholars who defend Colossian priority (full citations given below as cited): Dibelius, *Kolosser*, 57; Gnlika, *Epheserbrief*, 13; Schnackenburg, *Brief*, 27; Mußner, *Brief*, 18; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, I; Merklein, "Rezeption", 195 and "Paulinische Theologie in der Rezeption des Kolosser- und Epheserbriefes", Paulus in den neutestamentlichen Spätschriften (Freiburg: Herder, 1981), 25-69, 27, where he notes that this position has become the *opinio communis* among exegetical scholars.

⁵ Mitton, *Epistle*, 70. He notes that 11 of 12 dissenting scholars base their opinion on the assumption that Ephesians is the lost letter mentioned in Col. 4:16, τὴν ἐκ Λαοδικίας.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 71. Developments in the meaning of "church" or "the second coming of Christ" show later development in the thought of the author/redactor.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 71. The HT is expanded to address the first two relational pairs more fully; Col. 3:25 gives example of redaction: elements such as the severity of the instruction to the slaves is lessened, while the masters receive more specific instruction regarding impartiality. This represents editing of Col. 3:25 into Eph. 6:8-9. A case for the originality of the Eph. passages would be, then, an "extremely hard task."

arguments could be enlarged, but fuller treatment seems unnecessary, since there is no champion who still cares to advocate the priority of Ephesians.”⁸ In light of the general consensus among scholars, Best’s recent criticism of this state of affairs⁹ is not exaggerated: The majority of modern scholarly opinion has placed Ephesians in dependent relationship to Colossians, and at the end of a (deutero) Pauline literary trajectory.¹⁰ Best’s observation is not a mere beating of the drum for the minority view, however; determining the literary relationship between the letters (and traditional sources) is important for pastors and scholars who are interested in tracing literary and theological development within early Christian literature. The following critical examination of recent objections to the majority view, then, is not intended to dismiss the complexity of the Col.-Eph. redaction/relationship, or to diminish the importance of raising critical questions in this regard. Our hope is, rather, to offer possible solutions which highlight redactional intentions, as well as to suggest the most probable scenario of dependence/relationship. The matter of literary priority, we believe, merits consideration, as it carries significant ramifications for the understanding of the Colossian/Ephesian redaction in either arbitrary or consequent, theological terms. If Ephesians represents a reception and modification of the Col. original, the redaction implies theological/ethical intention on the author’s part; if a literary relationship cannot be established, then the particular features of the respective passages may be treated in nothing more than a comparative manner. In addition to our brief discussion of recent objections to the majority theory, we will suggest a possible redactional scenario for the innovative formulation found in Ephesians 5:21.

The Current Discussion of Col.-Eph. Dependence

Merklein, a strong proponent of Ephesian dependence upon Colossians, admits that the majority position is not without some

⁸ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁹ A dissenting voice in similar vein to Holtzmann is Ernest Best, “Who Used Whom? The Relationship of Ephesians and Colossians,” *NTS* 43 (1997): 72-96. He notes that Colossian priority has wrongly come to be an “accepted tenet” and “proven fact” among modern scholars.

¹⁰ Mitton’s treatment of this position in *Epistle* has become a standard; A.T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, ed. Ralph P. Martin, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990) xxxv-lxxiii, represents a more recent expression of the position.

difficulties.¹¹ The complexity of the two letters' interrelatedness has given rise to alternative theories regarding the process of confluence and redaction. H. J. Holtzmann's detailed critical study of the relationship between the letters was the first modern attempt to challenge the consensus by highlighting several parallel passages, demonstrating, in many instances, that Colossians possibly could be seen as being dependent upon Ephesians. He postulated a complex Col.-Eph.-Col. redaction, which could explain the phenomenon he saw as "wechselseitige Abhängigkeit."¹² More recently, Ernest Best¹³ and John Muddiman¹⁴ have reasserted Holtzmann's concern to consider alternate scenarios of the letters' relationship. Best develops this argument most fully, suggesting that the letters' common elements are the result of traditional materials available to a Pauline school. Discrete authors, working from a "Pauline pool", would have had contact within this school, and perhaps at some points, collaboration.¹⁵

¹¹ H. Merklein, "Eph 4,1-5,20 als Rezeption von Kol 3,1-17 (zugleich ein Beitrag zur Problematik des Epheserbriefes)," in *Kontinuität und Einheit* (FS F. Mußner), eds. P.-G. Müller and W. Stenger (Freiburg: Herder, 1981), 194-210. He characterizes the relation of dependence as "äußerst komplex."

¹² Holtzmann, *Kritik*, 83. "Das doppelte schriftstellerische Verhältnis beider Briefe" is a result of the original and authentically Pauline Colossians undergoing a revision (interpolation) under the influence of the later, deutero-Pauline Ephesians. The passages treated by Holtzmann were: Eph. 1:4; 1:6-7; 3:3,5,9; 3:17-18; 4:16; 4:22-24 and 5:19.

¹³ Best, "Relationship of Ephesians and Colossians," *NTS* 43 (1997): 72-96.

¹⁴ J. Muddiman, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, ed. M.D. Hooker, Black's New Testament Commentaries (London: Continuum, 2001).

¹⁵ Best, "Relations," 91. Best is cautious with his proofs, however; he insists that the authors drew from memory (no *Vorlage*), hymns, traditional materials and "normal epistolary formulae," showing randomness in their selection. Such traditional material, he rightly observes, cannot be used to argue priority. He admits, however, that "...most of the arguments [for Ephesian priority] can be turned the other way around." Other scholars, though less thorough in their analysis, reach more positive conclusions, notably John Coutts, "The Relationship of Ephesians and Colossians," *NTS* 4 (1957-58): 201-207. He argues that the general nature of the epistle suggests an earlier use as a homily, from which Colossians was drawn; several words and phrases are given as examples of conflation from Ephesians; here he makes reverse use of Mitton's arguments. That Ephesians contains more material from earlier Pauline letters has been suggested by the majority of scholars to be a sign of compilation, and thus a later date; W. Munro, "Evidences of a Late Literary Stratum?" *NTS* 18 (1972), 434-47, however, cites earlier Pauline material to suggest a closer affinity with the letter, and thus Ephesian priority.

This fluid contact, Best reasons, obscures the redactional relationship between the letters. As to the ultimate resolution of the nature of dependence, Best remains agnostic, however, allowing only a “slight probability” of Eph. priority.¹⁶ Muddiman, though equally unconvinced of Holzmann’s overall theory,¹⁷ makes a case for a singular occurrence of a second, Eph.-Col. redaction, as well as presenting a problematic parallel, both of which will be treated below.

John Muddiman

Muddiman’s analysis of the Col.-Eph. relationship, though brief, deserves attention. He correctly observes that many of the verbal similarities between the letters are limited to “just a few words in otherwise differently constructed sentences.”¹⁸ Within the longer parenetic section of Ephesians/Colossians, for example, related phrases have no more than one or two words¹⁹ in common, usually in random arrangement. In spite of this, he concedes exact parallels between Col. 4:7-8 and Eph. 6:21-22, as well as the two parenetic “clusters,” Col. 2:19 / Eph. 4:15b-16 and Col. 3:16f. /Eph. 5:18b-20. His listing is not intended to be exhaustive, yet the remarkable absence of the *Haustafel* (hereafter HT) [household code] as a significant and extensive parallel illustrates the brevity of his analysis.²⁰ In spite of this critical omission,

¹⁶ Ibid., 79. See also Van Roon, *Authenticity*, 430, fn. 2. Van Roon also argues for a Pauline school and the use of traditional materials, yet admits a “feeble” argument for Ephesian priority. The Pauline school, however, worked primarily from a singular “blueprint” source.

¹⁷ Muddiman, *Epistle*, 209.

¹⁸ Ibid., *Epistle*, 8.

¹⁹ The only exception being Col. 3:6 and Eph. 4:6, sharing the phrase ζρχεται ἡ ὄργη τοῦ θεοῦ. It should also be noted that Eph. 4:16 borrows from the theology and near-identical wording of Col. 2:19, creating another longer incidence of confluence; the vocabulary, however, can also be found in Ephesians’ theological section in 1:22. The parenthesis of Ephesians, though following the outline of Col. and its parenthesis, makes limited use of the “doctrinal” section of Col. 1:1-3:4. A number of these uses, however, can be traced to the Ephesian text, as well. Clear examples are: Eph. 4:1, Col. 1:10; Eph. 4:14, Col. 2:22; Eph. 4:16, Col. 2:19 (but also Eph. 1:22); Eph. 4:17, Col. 2:4; Eph. 5:27-28, Col. 1:22; Eph. 6:12, Col. 1:16 (but also Eph. 1:10 and 1:21).

²⁰ More than any phrase, conflation, or formula (even the lengthy parallel greeting, Col. 4:7-9/Eph. 6:21-22), the HT contains the most common material and follows the same schema, while introducing the lengthiest expansions/changes. It should be noted that the sections preceding and

Muddiman offers two examples which support a possible later interpolation of Eph. material into Col., or, alternately, illustrate the ambiguous relationship of the cited parallels. The first example which he notes is a parallel which has been ignored in critical scholarship, “both because it occurs very late in Colossians and also because it is very problematic” [to the advocates of Col.-Eph. sequence of dependence].²¹ The new parallel is Col. 3:12 and sections of Eph. 1:4, 6. The coincidental elements of the texts read as follows:

Col. 3:12: “...put on then, as chosen of God, holy and beloved...”

and Eph. 1:4, which contain similar ideas, if not vocabulary:

Eph.1:4: “...as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we may be holy and blameless before him in love.”

as well as this segment of Eph.:

Eph. 1:6: “...to the praise of his glorious grace which he generously bestowed upon us in the beloved.”²²

Muddiman draws our attention to the common ideas within these two parallels, particularly the attributes given to the saints in Colossians: being *elect of God*, *holy* and *beloved*. He notes that similar modifiers are found in the Eph. passages, yet the final attribute, “beloved” refers to believers in Col. and to Christ in Eph. This Eph. expression as a reference to Christ is unique to the NT, and deserves closer attention in an attempt to postulate its relation to Colossians. It must be noted, firstly, that Muddiman’s first parallel is only approximate, as the two verbs which convey the similar idea of being chosen are actually different Greek lexemes. Only the adjective “holy” remains consistent in terms of its referent. That this proposed parallel is problematic, Muddiman would agree. Having proposed this difficult

following each HT (Col. 3:16-17/Eph. 5:18-20; Col. 4:2-4/Eph. 6:19-20) contain a higher incidence of verbal coincidence, as well. This renders arguments for random/traditional adoption of the HT material less likely.

²¹ Muddiman, *Epistle*, 9. Mitton, *Epistle*, 281, had already noted the similarities, yet considered the parallel improbable.

²² The Greek citations will be included as footnotes at points where the inspection of the original text is deemed necessary. Col. 3:12:

Ἐνδύσασθε οὖν, ὡς ἐκλεκτοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ ἅγιοι καὶ ἡγαπημένοι... Eph. 1:4: καθὼς ἐξελέξατο ἡμᾶς ἐν αὐτῷ πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ... Eph.1:6: εἰς ἔπαινον δόξης τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ ἧς ἐχαρίτωσεν ἡμᾶς ἐν τῷ ἡγαπημένῳ.

parallel, he asks, “Is there any method in this alleged dependency? Is it psychologically credible?”²³ Considering the loose verbal agreement between the verses, the considerably divergent placement of the parallels within the respective letters, as well as the conflicting references to “beloved”, it may be that Muddiman’s observations reveal not a mismatched and confusing parallel, but no parallel at all. The challenge to this contention, of course, is to suggest a more tenable argument for explaining both alleged parallels independently.

It seems, first of all, that Col. 3:12, though certainly reflecting the theology of its own broader context,²⁴ has no direct redactional relationship to Eph. 1:4, 6. The phrase “as chosen of God, holy and beloved” represents a unique and independent formulation²⁵ within the Col. parenetic section (Col. 3:5-17) which was not directly adapted by the author of Ephesians in this otherwise similar parallel passage (Eph. 4:17-5:20). The broader message of the Col. passage (putting on and putting off imagery), however, can be located within the corresponding parenetic section of the Ephesian letter.²⁶

The formulations found in Eph. 1:4, 6 can be shown to be more than a contrived borrowing from the parenetic section of Colossians, reflecting a logical parallel found within the corresponding theological section in Col. The phrases found in Eph. 1:4, 6, we hope to show, are dependent upon the earlier Col. form, drawing from the Col. formulations as they appear, closely grouped in 1:13, 14, and subsequently in 1:22 (verses 15-18, the Christ Hymn, being omitted as such in the Eph. redaction). These three verses account for the Ephesian expression, demonstrating a close verbal connection, as well as an explanation for the Ephesian association of “beloved”, not with believers, but with Christ. If we allow that the Ephesian verbal

²³ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁴ Cf. Col. 3:10, ἐνδυσάμενοι; 1:2, 4, 12, 22 and 26 for examples of the usage of ἅγιος referring exclusively to believers; usage of ἀγάπη in 1:4, 8, 13; 2:2; 3:14; ἀγαπητός in 1:7; 4:7, 9, 14; whereas the verb ἀγαπάω finds expression only in the parenetic section in 3:12 and the HT in 3:19.

²⁵ The adjectives ἅγιοι καὶ ἠγαπημένοι can be found throughout the letter (cf. fn. 23). ἐκλεκτός, however, is found only here in Col. and is absent in Eph.; similar citations referring to believers can be found in Rom. 8:33, τὶς ἐγκαλέσει κατὰ ἐκλεκτῶν θεοῦ; and 16:13, ἀσπάσασθε Ῥοῦφον τὸν ἐκλεκτὸν ἐν κυρίῳ and may indicate a stock phrase in Pauline usage.

²⁶ ἐνδύσαθε found in Col. 3:12 finds its counterpart in the same parenetic section of Ephesians, 4:24: ἐνδύσασθαι.

formulation for “chosen” to stand alone (it is unique to both letters),²⁷ we will need to illustrate how the author of Ephesians came to his formulations in Eph. 1:4, 6, particularly the “holy” state of believers as well as the surprising relation of “the beloved” to Christ.

1.) Eph. 1:4: **holy** as a designation for believers

Parallels to this particular adjective can be found at several points in the letter to the Colossians, and taken in isolation, the comparisons would be misleading. In Ephesians, however, “holy” finds itself embedded in a larger parallel, which is located in the theological section of Col., previously noted by Mitton.²⁸

Colossians 1:22: “...[you] he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him...”

Ephesians 1:4: “...as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we may be holy and blameless before him in love.”²⁹

The theological significance of Col. 1:21-22, the shift of the believers’ alienation to reconciliation with God, has not been overlooked by the author of Ephesians. The content is remarkably similar, though abbreviated (most notably the omission of the negative aspect, a characteristic of the Eph. author’s redaction). It appears that Col. 1:22 offers a closer parallel, and a better explanation for the characteristic of holiness attributed to believers in Eph. 1:4.

2.) Eph. 1:6: **in the beloved**

Muddiman’s observation that this adjectival noun refers to Christ, and not believers, is correct. It can be said that nearly every reference to love in Col., whether in verbal, adjectival, or noun form, pertains directly to believers or their behaviour. Love is seen as being actively expressed on the human level, or acknowledged as a passive state, in

²⁷ It could be argued that ἐξελέξατο expresses the sense of election in Col. 1:12,13: εὐχαριστοῦντες τῷ πατρὶ τῷ ἰκανώσαντι ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν μερίδα τοῦ κλήρου τῶν ἁγίων ἐν τῷ φωτί· ὃς ἐρρύσατο ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ σκότους καὶ μετέστησεν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ υἱοῦ τῆς ἀγάπης αὐτοῦ.

²⁸ Mitton, *Ephesians*, 281.

²⁹ Col.1:22: νυνὶ δὲ ἀποκατήλλαξεν ἐν τῷ σώματι τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου παραστήσαι ὑμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους καὶ ἀνεγκλήτους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ; Eph. 1:4: καθὼς ἐξελέξατο ἡμᾶς ἐν αὐτῷ πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ.

which the believer is characterized as “beloved,” the recipient of love from both God and other believers. To link these human references directly to Christ would represent a shift in the original intention of the Col. author. For this reason, Muddiman’s connection of Col. 3:12 (or any number of other instances where believers are meant) with Eph. 1:6 is mistaken. There is, however, a singular exception in the Col. author’s employment of love as a regulating/descriptive element of human relations. This can be found in Col. 1:13: “He has delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved son.” Here we find clear reference to the comprehensive work of salvation, which includes transfer into the kingdom of the Son, who is, in this unique formulation, described as “beloved.” It is possible that the author of Eph. has taken both elements of this pivotal verse, and reformulated them in the corresponding theological section of Eph. 1:5-6.³⁰ This transfer in Col. 1:13 loses its negative element “from the power of darkness” (again, typical of the author of Eph.), yet the aspect of being placed into the kingdom of the Son is transformed by the author of Eph. By accentuating the purposes of God,³¹ the author of Eph. depicts the transfer in terms of its result, a relationship characterized as being destined unto sonship. The notion of sonship is unique here and has likely been influenced by the Col. formulation “kingdom of his beloved son”, Eph. 1:5: “He destined us to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will.” The elements of transfer into, and belonging to, the Son’s kingdom are retained and reformulated in positive, static terms in Eph. 1:5. The following verse, 1:6, though primarily a new formulation, gives expression to the unique phrase in Col. 1:13, “of his beloved son”: Eph. 1:6: “to the praise of his glorious grace which he generously bestowed upon us in the beloved.” This, it should be noted, is the only occurrence in Eph. where Christ/God is the recipient of love, making the coincidental appearance of this phenomenon in both letters highly unlikely. The Eph. formulation represents a change from the Col.

³⁰ Placing Col. 1:13 and Eph. 1:5-6 in parallel relationship. Eph. 1:7, it might be added, forms a close parallel to Col. 1:14, suggesting that the immediately preceding material may have been drawn in sequence, as we have argued.

³¹ *θέλημα* occurs seven times in Ephesians, over against three in Col.; only 2:3 refers to human will. The word features prominently in this section (1:5, 9, 11), and represents a significant expansion and development of its usage in Col. 1:9 from being an object to be grasped to its representation in Eph. as a determining force in the execution of the believer’s salvation.

original; this corresponds, however, to the tendency of the author's style.³²

In conclusion, the formulations found in Eph. 1:4, 6 can be explained in terms of dependence upon the Col. original, taken and transformed from the corresponding theological sections. Muddiman's proposed parallel with Col. 3:12, an attempt to display the arbitrary nature of the Col.-Eph. redactional relationship, should be dismissed in terms of its unconvincing features as a parallel, making way for more tenable solutions.

Muddiman's next evidence against a Col.-Ephesian redaction lies in his analysis of the parallel found in Col. 2:19 and Eph. 4:15b-16, notably the only parallel which he admits as conclusive.³³ Muddiman notes that several features of the Col. parallel, including style, grammar, and vocabulary, suggest a later interpolation of the Eph. material into the Col. text. The parallel texts are as follows:

Col. 2:19: "...and not holding fast to the head, from whom the whole body, fed and knit together by its joints and ligaments, grows the growth of God."

Eph. 4:15-16: "...rather, speaking the truth in love, we grow into him in all things, who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each does its share, grows and builds itself up in love."³⁴

Muddiman notes, firstly, the lack of gender agreement in the Colossian formulation, "the head [feminine], from whom [masculine]", due to the lack of a masculine referent. He correctly observes that the

³² Both the authors of Col. and Eph. tend to employ *ἐν*+ dative to qualify a state of being or behaviour; Eph. extends this usage considerably, particularly in direct reference to God or Christ (34 instances against 19 in Col.).

³³ Muddiman, *Epistle*, 209.

³⁴ Col. 2:19: καὶ οὐ κρατῶν τὴν κεφαλὴν, ἐξ οὗ πᾶν τὸ σῶμα διὰ τῶν ἁφῶν καὶ συνδέσμων ἐπιχορηγούμενον καὶ συμβιβαζόμενον αὖξει τὴν αὔξησιν τοῦ θεοῦ. Eph. 4:15-16: ἀληθεύοντες δὲ ἐν ἀγάπῃ αὐξήσωμεν εἰς αὐτὸν τὰ πάντα, ὅς ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ, Χριστός, ἐξ οὗ πᾶν τὸ σῶμα συναρμολογούμενον καὶ συμβιβαζόμενον διὰ πάσης ἁφῆς τῆς ἐπιχορηγίας κατ' ἐνέργειαν ἐν μέτρῳ ἐνὸς ἐκάστου μέρους τὴν αὔξησιν τοῦ σώματος ποιεῖται εἰς οἰκοδομὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ.

³⁵ 1:18, αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος τῆς ἐκκλησίας; 2:10, ὅς ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας.

Ephesian formulation, in contrast, shows agreement with its antecedent, Christ, making clear grammatical sense. The author of Col., he reasons, has clumsily adapted the familiar Eph. passage, his subsequent interpolation omitting the clear masculine referent found in the original. Grammatical dissonance is thereby created in his positioning of the feminine noun, “head”, in close relationship to the masculine pronoun. Several observations are necessary here. The masculine referent in Col. is given in the context of the passage, and would have been understood by the hearers as intimating Christ. In his larger discourse, the author of Col. has represented Christ as the universal head, sovereign over the church, as well as the powers and authorities.³⁵ This unique appellation is particularly important in the author’s attempt to display Christ as pre-eminent (1:18). It is especially true of the immediate context of 2:19, where the author exposes elements of the false teaching which had gained a hearing in Col. Against such shadowy claims Christ is depicted as substance, 2:17: “These are a shadow of the things to come; the substance, however, belongs to Christ.” The author of Col., still arguing for Christ’s pre-eminence as the source of growth in the body in 2:19, would rely on the previous context (in which Christ figures as the ultimate authority) for his masculine antecedent. Having established a contrast between the claims and troubling practices of the Col. innovators and Christ, it is clear, then, that those who are boasting in their esoteric experiences, (v.18), are not holding to the head, namely Christ. Col. 2:19 shows little sign, then, of being an interpolation, as the elements of the verse continue the thought of v. 18, promote the pre-eminence of Christ, and signal continuity with the explicit use of “head”, the contextual marker for Christ.

Muddiman, discussing the content of the parallel, notes that the “context of Colossians fails to explain the emphasis on the church’s growth,” whereas this is a central theme in Ephesians. The verse is “at home” in Ephesians, but represents an “intrusion” in the Col. context.³⁶ His observation in respect to Eph. is correct, where the church is indeed depicted as being built up through various ministries and spiritual gifts, moving towards maturity (contrasting growth unto maturity with childhood), a mutual “growing” into Christ the head (Eph. 4:11-15). This might be expected, as the author of Ephesians develops his

³⁶ Ibid., 208. Both letters reveal an interest in growth imagery, perhaps related to early teaching derived from the remarkably similar vocabulary of the sower parable (ρίζα, καρπός, αὐξάνω, καρποφορέω, μυστήριον) in Mk. 4, Mt. 13 and Luke 8.

theology and ethics in more explicit terms of the church.³⁷ Growth, however, relating to the believer and the life of faith, can be shown to represent a comparably important theme in Colossians. A listing of mutual occurrences, at several points actually expanded in Col., shows this clearly:

(1.) **“to grow”**³⁸

The verb “to grow” figures prominently in both letters, and is related in Eph. 2:21 and 4:15 to the corporate church and individuals respectively; the use in Colossians, *three* occurrences, 1:6, 1:10 and 2:19 (as well as the noun form here) relates to the faith of the individual in terms of God. Though slightly different in emphasis, the concept of growth is present in Colossians.

(2.) **“to be rooted”**³⁹

Both letters have a single occurrence of the admonition to be “rooted”, a part of the growth imagery of the letters found in Eph. 3:17 and Col. 2:7. The Eph. reference relates to the more general concept of love (modified by the phrase “in love”); the Col. citation is connected to Christ, in whom the believer is to be rooted and built up, *in him*.

(3.) **“to build up”**⁴⁰

“Being built up” is also equally represented in the letters in Eph. 2:20 and Col. 2:7. The Ephesian reference, however, refers to the placement of believers into the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, whereas the Col. reference is again related directly to Christ and faith.

(4.) **“to knit, join together”**⁴¹

To be “knit” or “joined together” is found once in Eph. at 4:16; it refers to the body of Christ as it is being joined in love. Col. shows *two* occurrences, 2:2 and 2:19. Col. 2:2 refers to the hearts of individual believers being knit together, whereas 2:19, though similar to Eph., associates the joining of the body directly with God’s activity. Beyond these *common* verbal forms which express growth in both letters, Col. employs two verbs which extend its growth metaphor: “to establish,

³⁷ The listing of offices and gifts employed in the church (2:19-20, 4:11), its unique placement as the mediator of God’s plan (3:9-10), as well as the larger number of references to the church (primarily in the expanded HT), point to this development.

³⁸ ἀυξάνω.

³⁹ ῥιζόω.

⁴⁰ ἐποικοδομέω.

⁴¹ συμβιβάζω.

make firm”⁴² is linked to faith in v. 2:7, accentuating the idea of being established in the faith. Even more significantly, the verb “to bear fruit”⁴³ finds expression at two points (in notable conjunction with “to grow”), Col. 1:6, 10, both references speaking of the believers’ life in faith as it bears good works in the Gospel. Though the Col. references to growth apply primarily to the life of the members as they live out the Gospel in faith, and differ in this to their Eph. counterparts, they represent a significant emphasis of the author, so that the growth vocabulary found in Col. 2:19 cannot be construed as an “intrusion” into the text.

In spite of Muddiman’s acute observations, it is more likely that the longer (and smoother) reading of the Ephesian parallel represents an expansion (the *nature* of the growth within the body is explicated) and clarification (making express reference to Christ, which is a particular feature of the Eph. redaction) upon the earlier Col. form.⁴⁴ It is also more general in its formulation, representing an adaptation of the particular (and deleted) concerns of the Col. author. It is difficult to imagine how this longer, more generally formulated reading, which clarifies and expands the material in Col., would have been adapted in such a defective manner at this point in the Col. letter.

Ernest Best

E. Best also has given recent treatment to the question of Col.-Eph. dependence. His more thorough analysis, which includes reference to the HT material, draws the reader’s attention to the traditional nature of a number of passages which reveal remarkable similarities in their phraseology.⁴⁵ The parallel passages, he reasons, share a common

⁴² βεβαιόω.

⁴³ καρποφορέω.

⁴⁴ Muddiman, *Epistle*, 209, notes that the Col. formulation αὐξει τὴν αὐξησιν τοῦ θεοῦ does not fit the passage, being “abrupt” and “elliptical.” He observes that the meaning is not clear, stating, “God after all does not grow!” The unusual formulation, perhaps needing explication, is no proof of dependence, however (cf. just two of the unique, yet notably undefined NT formulations in Eph.: 4:18, ζῶης τοῦ θεοῦ; and particularly 3:19, which is equally elliptical and in need of clarification: ἵνα πληρωθῆτε εἰς πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ θεοῦ); if, as he observes, the Eph. letter explicates this formulation, it might be argued that the author of Eph. has intentionally expanded and clarified this concept by means of his ecclesiological emphasis.

⁴⁵ The parallel passages are treated in the following order, with Best’s proposed designation immediately after: Eph. 1:10/Col. 1:16, 20 – hymn; Eph.

traditional source, and cannot be employed as an indication of dependence in either direction. This observation is correct insofar as we are able to discern a common formulation, or suggest the original sociological context of the passages at hand.⁴⁶ Best's extensive list offers a number of genuine possibilities for understanding a third, traditional and *independent* reservoir of traditions, which might explain a number of common passages proposed by Mitton in his extensive treatment of the Col.-Eph. relationship. A limited number of parallels could, then, be dismissed in this manner as coincidental, traditional usage. It is the sheer number and disparate nature of these potentially traditional passages, however, which diminishes the force of Best's argument. The unusually high number and diversity of the parallels suggest a dependent relationship between the letters. If every instance of an independent source suggested by Best were allowed as an explanation of the relationship between the letters, including the coincidental ordering of the traditional material along theological and parenetic lines, the parallels would be a remarkable coincidence, indeed. Best is aware that the letters reflect an alignment of their theological and parenetic sections. In spite of this, he dismisses Merklein's observation that the placement of the HT within the respective letters cannot be attributed to traditional borrowing, but reveals a reception of both content and order.⁴⁷ Although Best notes

5:3,5/Col. 3:5 – vice list; Eph. 1:1-2/Col. 1:1-2 – epistolary formula; Eph. 1:17/Col. 1:3 – liturgy, *HT material designated as traditional*; Eph. 5:19-20/Col. 3:16-17 – common patterns of worship; Eph. 5:6/Col. 3:6 – universal NT concept; Eph. 5:15-16/Col. 4:6 – common phrase; Eph. 4:22-24/Col. 3:8-12 – catechetical instruction; Eph. 4:15b-16/Col. 2:19 – common image within Pauline school; Eph. 4:2/Col. 3:12-13 – pre-existing list; Eph. 1:4/Col. 1:22 – phrase of Pauline school; Eph. 1:7/Col. 1:14, 22 – church tradition; Eph. 1:8b, 9a/Col. 3:16; 1:27 – OT; Eph. 1:17-17/Col. 1:4, 9, 3, 10 – Pauline phrase; Eph. 1:15/Col. 1:4 – Pauline phrase; Eph. 1:18/Col. 1:27 – Pauline phrase; Eph. 1:20/Col. 2:12; 3:1 – common NT theme; Eph. 1:22/Col. 1:17-19, 24 – hymn; Eph. 2:1/Col. 2:13a – traditional couplet; Eph. 2:16/Col. 1:20-22 – traditional hymn.

⁴⁶ Mitton, *Epistle*, 58, concedes this point for clearly identifiable formulae; Best follows Greeven's observation in M. Dibelius, *An die Kolosser, Epheser, an Philemon*, Handbuch zum Neuen Testament (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1953), 113, that "Col und Eph nicht unmittelbar voneinander, sondern beide von einer Tradition bestimmt sind."

⁴⁷ Merklein, "Rezeption", 195. He assumes Eph. dependence, yet shows convincingly how the material preceding the HT reveals a reception of Col., including the ordering of the parenetic section.

both similarities and unique features within the parenetic section, these fail to lessen the significance of Merklein's contention. The appeal to traditional material alone cannot account for the orderly coincidence of material found between the letters.

Best does not rely solely upon an appeal to traditional material, however, to argue his point. He briefly examines the relationship between several of the common texts he lists, citing the arguments from both Mitton and Holtzmann and pronouncing them inconclusive. The indefinite nature of their relative dependence is taken as an indication of a third, independent source. The HT material of the two letters forms no exception. Best postulates a traditional, Christianized version of the HT, which served as a foundation for the known HT forms as found in Col. and Eph. The authors of our HT knew this form, and borrowed particular stock phrases, albeit from memory. He does not attempt to account for the remarkable (and from memory alone improbable) agreement in argumentation, structure and verbal coincidence. As a test case, Best analyses the passages regarding the third relational pair, slaves and masters, to illustrate the arbitrary relationship evidenced by unique aspects of the HT forms. This relational pair, expanded in the otherwise abbreviated Col. HT, offers a larger amount of coincidental material, and as we shall see, a number of important differences. It should be noted at this point that Best represents the only treatment of the HT material which questions the Col.-Eph. redactional sequence. Again, Best suggests that the variations are due to an independent source, which has been appropriated according to the interests of the respective authors. A closer examination of his evidences may prove helpful in ascertaining the pattern of dependence (if at all), or whether the HT stand in a "purely random" relationship.⁴⁸

Any comparison of the two HT forms will show that the Eph. HT has expanded the material considerably in the first two relational pairs, creating a broader Christian argument for the desired behaviour. The third pair, slave-master, demonstrates the *least* amount of additional material, but shows innovation nonetheless. Best takes note of this particular aspect, first of all, ascribing to the Eph. HT a "greater Christian context".⁴⁹ This is seen in the addition of the motivation to the slaves in 6:5, "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as unto Christ", particularly the phrase, "as unto Christ". This singular citation of the Eph. author's Christianizing of the HT ethic is inconclusive for determining

⁴⁸ Best, "Relationship", 81.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 80.

dependence, however, for as Best indicates, the Col. HT can be shown to extend the Christian context of the Eph. HT, as well. The instance is found in Col. 3:22, “Slaves, obey in all things those who are your earthly masters, not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing the Lord.” Here he suggests that the author “relates the slave’s fear to the Lord and not the owner.”⁵⁰ This observation deserves special attention. First of all, Best is correct in locating the Col. HT motivation as divine, and *directly* related to the slaves, all their duties of obedience being executed while “fearing the Lord.” This element of Col., so Best, though not fully lost in Eph., is located solely upon the human level of motivation, being directed in 6:5 towards the masters, as indicated in the phrase “with fear and trembling.” The phrase “with fear and trembling,” however, is not a random alteration drawn from an independent source,⁵¹ but rather replaces the intention of the present participle “fearing” found in Col. (where it likewise modifies the imperative to obey) with a stereotyped word pair. Not only does this use of word pairs (stereotyped, synonymous, and simple) fit the style of the author of Eph.,⁵² it introduces a thoroughly divine aspect to the Eph.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 80.

⁵¹ Though this phrase can be found in 1 Cor. 2:3, 2 Cor. 7:15, and Phil. 2:12 (occurrences which may have influenced the author), the impulse for choosing the expression lies within the original Col. text.

⁵² Dibelius, *Kolossier*, 84, points out a characteristic of the Eph. author’s style as the “Häufung synonymer Ausdrücke.” These are typically found in noun/verbal pairs and triplets, adjectivally joined synonyms, or among the many (95 within 115 verses!) genitive constructions. The HT shows several examples of word pairs: 5:27a, σπίλον ἢ ρυτίδα; 5:27b, ἀγία καὶ ἁμώμος; 5:29b, ἐκτρέφει καὶ θάλπει; 6:4b, παιδεία καὶ νοουθεσία; 6:5, φόβου καὶ τρόμου. The broader letter reveals this as an element of the author’s style: 1:4, ἅγιος καὶ ἁμώμος; 1:5, τὴν εὐδοκίαν τοῦ θελήματος; 1:8b, ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ καὶ φρονήσει; 1:11a, προορισθέντες κατὰ πρόθεσιν; 1:11b, κατὰ τὴν βουλὴν τοῦ θελήματος; 1:6, 12, 14, ἔπαινον (τῆς) δόξης; 1:14, ἀρραβῶν τῆς κληρονομίας ... ἀπολύτρωσιν τῆς περιποιήσεως; 1:19 (6:10), τοῦ κράτους τῆς ἰσχύος; 1:23 (3:19), πλήρωμα... πληρουμένου; 2:2, αἰῶνα τοῦ κόσμου; 2:2b, ἄρχοντα τῆς ἐξουσίας; 2:3, τὰ θελήματα τῆς σαρκὸς καὶ τῶν διανοιῶν; ἐν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις τῆς σαρκὸς; 2:14, μεστότοιχον τοῦ φραγμοῦ; 2:15, νόμον τῶν ἐντολῶν ἐν δόγμασιν; 2:19, ξένοι καὶ πάροικοι; 2:20 (3:5), ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν; 3:6, συγκληρονόμα καὶ σύσσωμα καὶ συμμετοχα; 3:7, δωρεὰν τῆς χάριτος; 3:7 (3:20), ἐνέργειαν τῆς δυνάμεως; 3:9, τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ ἀποκεκρυμμένου; 3:10, ταῖς ἀρχαῖς καὶ ταῖς ἐξουσίαις; 3:12, παρρησίαν καὶ προσαγωγὴν; 3:15(1:10), ἐν οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς; 3:17, ἔρριζωμένοι καὶ τεθεμελιωμένοι; 3:20, ὑπὲρ πάντα ποιῆσαι ὑπερεκπερισσοῦ; αἰτούμεθα ἢ νοοῦμεν; 3:21, εἰς πάσας τὰς

motivation as found in the OT. The familiarity of the OT phrase, as well as its referring exclusively to fear towards God, makes it highly unlikely that this usage by the author of Eph. would indicate a mere human level of motivation. The element of fear and trembling (similarly to “fearing” in Col.) modifies the slaves’ obedience, and is ultimately limited by, and subject to, the final modifying phrase “as unto Christ.” The realm of obedience is indeed human; the motivation, however, is towards Christ. To this it might be added that the author of Eph. has already indicated in Eph. 5:21 that the motivation of fear is to be understood as regulating *all* relations in terms of Christ. The Eph. HT, though evidencing clear differences in vocabulary, cannot be shown to promote a less Christianized ethic than its Col. counterpart. The notable differences, furthermore, do not indicate an independent source, but show a tendency to retain the fullness and logic of the Col. argument, albeit in the distinctive style of the Eph. author.

In similar manner, Best maintains that certain significant phrases found in the Col. HT are lost, noting the absence of the important and unique phrase in Col. 3:24, “serve the Lord Christ.”⁵³ At first glance, this appears to be true. Upon closer inspection of the Eph. HT, however, we discover that the elements of this phrase are actually preserved and enhanced by the author of Ephesians. Eph. 6:6 incorporates both elements of the Colossian command to the slaves by denoting them as servants of Christ, making use of the title: “...as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God.” The idea is further developed in 6:7, where the nature of the slaves’ obedience (the Col. command) is expressed in terms of service: “serving enthusiastically as to the Lord, and not men.” The author of Ephesians has replaced the singular verb form of Col.(to serve) with noun and participle forms of the verbal command, as well as representing both titles, Christ and Lord. This, joined with the Eph. author’s emphasis upon the will of God, combines

γενεάς τοῦ αἰῶνος τῶν αἰώνων; 4:1(4:4), κλήσεως ἧς ἐκλήθητε; 4:2, ταπεινοφροσύνης καὶ πραύτητος; 4:14, κλυδωνιζόμενοι καὶ περιφερόμενοι; κυβεῖα...πανουργία...μεθοδεῖαν; 4:16, συναρμολογούμενοι καὶ συμβιβάζομενοι; τὴν αὔξησιν...οικοδομῆν; 4:23, πνεύματι τοῦ νοῦς; 4:24, ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ καὶ ὁσιότητι; 4:31, πικρία καὶ θυμὸς καὶ ὀργή; 5:2, προσφορὰν καὶ θυσίαν; 5:3, πορνεία δὲ καὶ ἀκαθαρσία; 5:4, μωρολογία ἢ εὐτραπελία; 5:9, ἀγαθωσύνη καὶ δικαιοσύνη; 5:19, ψαλμοῖς καὶ ὕμνοις καὶ ᾠδαῖς πνευματικαῖς; ᾄδοντες καὶ ψάλλοντες; 6:12, αἷμα καὶ σάρκα; τὰς ἀρχάς...τὰς ἐξουσίας; 6:18, προσευχῆς καὶ δεήσεως; 6:21, ἀδελφὸς καὶ...διάκονος.

⁵³ τῷ κυρίῳ Χριστῷ δουλεύετε.

the impulses of both letters. Here we see expansion rather than a deletion of the Col. HT message.

Best further observes that many of the phrases shared between the two HT forms have been moved about, such variations intimating a third source from which the authors randomly borrowed. His first example is the most significant, for it implies much more than a slight shift in location within a closed argument, but a change in the implications of the argument itself. The word favouritism, he notes, has been moved from its original position in Col. 3:25 to the final sentence of the Eph. HT, 6:9. This in itself would not be particularly remarkable, except that it appears that this piece of instruction, originally directed towards the slaves (Col. 3:25) has now been applied to the masters in Eph. 6:9. His observation, however, does not allow for the transitional and bilateral regulatory function of Col. 3:25.⁵⁴ The verse regulates *both* sections of the slave-master relationship as found in Colossians; the author of Ephesians has simply applied the principle of impartial judgment to the masters in this case. This complies with the tendency of the author of Eph. to further mediate the slave-master relation in terms of Christ, creating a more pronounced Christian ethic.⁵⁵ Other examples which Best enumerates refer to movement of particular phrases within a closed thought. These examples show nothing more than the author's creative hand in crafting his argument, and cannot be employed to suggest an independent source.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ The verse serves a transitional function in the slave-master instruction, leading, much like a swinging door, into the instruction to the masters. The illicit behaviours intimated in v. 24 by ἀδικῶν and ἠδίκησεν find their positive counterpart in the masters' expected conduct in 4:1, τὸ δίκαιον καὶ ἰσότητα, making it unlikely that v. 25 is directed solely to the slave.

⁵⁵ Best, "Relationship", 81, admits that the Eph. HT "sets slaves and masters more firmly on the same plane before God than does Colossians." This can be further seen in the deletion of the Col. slave's duties κατὰ πάντα, as well as in the startling expansion in the instruction to the slaves, which frames the warning found in 6:8 in more specific, inclusive terms: τοῦτο κομίσεται παρὰ κυρίου εἴτε δοῦλος εἴτε ἐλεύθερος. Finally, the instruction to the masters begins with a reciprocal command in 6:9a, which extends the previous material to them: τὰ αὐτὰ ποιεῖτε πρὸς αὐτούς. The author of Eph. transforms the Col. HT by mediating its commands, introducing reciprocal responsibilities, and making the ethic of just recompense (Col. 3:25) explicitly bilateral.

⁵⁶ The following changes, noted by Best, imply only editorial freedom: the reversal of ἐν ἀπλότῃ καρδίᾳ and ὀφθαλμοδουλία; the reference to fear moves its relative position.

Best also notes incidences where words are employed in a differing manner in each HT. Although this might be expected as a result of the editorial process, Best again sees these variations as an indication of an independent source. The verb to receive,⁵⁷ he points out, refers to punishment in Col. 3:25, but to reward in Eph. 6:8. Here both examples given by Best may be joined, as their emphases (Eph. good-reward; Col. injustice-punishment) correspond. Logically, the context would allow for either emphasis, yet he is correct in noting this significant difference. Later in his article, he cites the same pair of verses as evidencing another significant change: the Col. passage forbids wrongdoing, whereas the Eph. author stresses doing the good.⁵⁸ These examples, we would suggest, are not the result of an independent literary source, but of conscious editorial activity. The author of Eph. tends to express his ethic in positive terms.⁵⁹

Another example of change which Best cites is the concept of inheritance, found in the Col. HT in 3:24, but finding no expression in the Eph. HT whatsoever. This appears unusual, since it is used elsewhere by the author of Eph. in 1:14, 18 and 5:5. The absence of the word in the Eph. HT, however, cannot rule out a direct relationship between the letters. The singular and significant occurrence of this word in Col. within the expanded and Christianized slave-master relationship of the HT may have influenced the author of Eph. to incorporate the term into both the theological and parenetic sections at the three points mentioned; the command to the slaves in Colossians is, further, reflected in Eph. 6:8, "...knowing that whatever good one does, he will receive the same again from the Lord – be he slave or free," being expanded in explicit terms of who shall receive the recompense (slave and free), yet compressed in terms of this particular expression

⁵⁷ κομίσεται.

⁵⁸ ὁ ἀδικῶν vs. ἕκαστος εἰάν τι ποιήσῃ ἀγαθόν.

⁵⁹ This can be seen, of course, in these two instances in Col. 3:25 and Eph. 6:8. Further examples are found in the deletion of the negative command to the husbands in Col. 3:19b, which is substituted with the positive admonitions of loving as Christ in Eph. 5:25-26; children are given positive instruction in Eph. in the form of a scriptural promise, which extends the motivation far beyond that found in Col.; fathers in both Col. and Eph. are instructed not to provoke their children; the Col. motivation is negative, ἵνα μὴ ἀθυμώσιν; the Eph. motivation substitutes a further, positive admonition: ἀλλὰ ἐκτρέφετε αὐτὰ ἐν παιδείᾳ καὶ νοουθεσίᾳ κυρίου; in keeping with the shift mentioned above, the instruction to the slaves in Eph. adds positive elements to the otherwise negative formulations found in both texts, θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ/μετ' εὐνοίας/ἀγαθόν.

(reward being implied by “this”, whose antecedent in 6:8a is “the good”). It is noteworthy that the author of Eph. emphasizes both positive intention (“serving with enthusiasm”, 6:7a) and behaviour (“doing good, doing the will of God”) of the slave in this section. It is this *positive* behaviour which is linked to the received recompense. The omission of the term “inheritance” indicates the editorial activity of the author of Eph., who has expanded the influence of the original slave instruction of Col. 3:24 to both parties, while retaining the sense of reward through his emphasis on correct behaviour and corresponding recompense.

Other differences in the HT form noted by Best include the Eph. author’s phrase “doing the will” in 6:6, which he notes “is simpler than the corresponding phrase in Col. 3:23.” This phrase is actually an addition to the HT material,⁶⁰ and cannot be construed as a simplification of Col. 3:23, whose elements are adopted into the Eph. HT.⁶¹

Though Best has noted a number of unique characteristics of the HT forms in Col. and Eph., his examples fail to indicate how a third, independent source might lie behind these various additions, slight changes in order, and omissions. From such a variety of alterations it becomes practically impossible to construe an earlier Christianized form of the HT from which both Col. and Eph. might have been drawn. Without a clear indication of how this might have occurred, and from which original constructions, Best’s theory remains rather speculative. The agnostic nature of his thesis, though effectively defusing the dependence question, proposes no *necessary* conclusions, nor does it adequately account for the remarkable similarities of the HT material in terms of order, verbal agreement, or development.

⁶⁰ τὸ θέλημα θεοῦ and its derivatives are found seven times in Eph., an expansion over the three instances found in Col. 1:1, 9 and 4:12. In Col. all instances refer to the will of God in an abstract, statal, determinative sense; Eph. carries this meaning in 1:1, 5, 9, 11, but is more direct in applying the known will of God to ethical behaviour in 2:3 (corrupt human desire), 5:17 (knowing the will of God in combination with wise behaviour) and 6:6 (*doing* the will of God).

⁶¹ Only the command ἐργάσθε has been replaced by the participle δουλεύοντες, perhaps as a displacement of this verb form in 3:23 in favour of the unique command to serve Christ (τῷ κυρίῳ Χριστῷ δουλεύετε) in Col. 3:24.

A Test Case, Ephesian 5:21

As stated above, it is not our intention to dismiss creative analysis and sound questions regarding the relationship between Col. and Eph. posed by Muddiman and Best; on the contrary, their questions rightly raise the question of if, and how, the two texts may be compared and understood, particularly in regards to their unique theological emphases. It is necessary, then, to press the question which they have indirectly raised: “Is the traditional proposal of a Col.-Eph. redaction helpful in this effort?”

We have noted that the parenetic sections of Col. and Eph. evidence the greatest amount of coincidental material and verbal agreement between the two letters, with the highest concentration of coincidence found immediately before, after, and within the respective HT forms. It appears reasonable, then, to consider how one of the most striking and frequently discussed characteristics of the Ephesian HT, the transitional verse 5:21, might have gained its unique formulation via the proposed Col. template. It is our hope that our analysis will offer both a redactional scenario as well as a theological motivation for the Ephesian author’s formulation.

The Ephesian HT is noteworthy in that it is joined⁶² to the previous parenetic section by means of verbal dependence upon a present participle, “submitting,” which is found in verse 21. The participles flow in tight succession in verses 19-21: speaking, singing, making song, giving thanks, and submitting. The final participle in 5:21 provides the verbal expression⁶³ for verse 22, “...wives to your own husbands,” drawing the HT material into a more immediate relationship with the preceding material.⁶⁴ Here it seems that the author has made

⁶² There is much discussion regarding the division of the passage, consigning v. 21 either to the previous section, or to the HT (UBS Greek text places break after v.21, the NA after v. 20). Both positions have merit, yet assigning a firm position overlooks the intentionally transitional nature of the verse. E. Best, *Ephesians*, New Testament Guides (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 515f., give this editorial question an excellent treatment.

⁶³ Though a considerable number of texts insert ὑποτασέσθωσαν or ὑποτάσσεσθε after either γυναικες or ἀνδράσιν in verse 22, this would be a departure from the author’s succinct style, and is most likely a scribal insertion intended to insure clarity. See Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 608f., or Best, *Ephesians*, 531, for helpful discussions in favour of the simpler reading.

⁶⁴ N. Baumert, *Frau und Mann bei Paulus* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1993), 193, correctly identifies this verse as a *Bindeglied*, joining the two sections under the more general admonitions of the preceding section. The Greek text

intentional use of “submitting,” not only to introduce the theme of submission which initiates, and to some degree characterizes, the HT material,⁶⁵ but to establish a smoother transition than we see in Col., as well. The grammatical and thematic link created by v. 21 reveals, it seems, the author’s creative attempt to integrate the HT material into its broader parenetic field.⁶⁶

Verse 21, when considered apart from its grammatical and transitional function, introduces an undeniably unique aspect of the Eph. parenetic material in its emphases upon mutual submission and its motivation, the fear of Christ.⁶⁷ In analyzing this verse, we hope to highlight the unique aspects of the author’s formulation, which in turn will have implications regarding his *intentions* in joining the parenetic material and the HT.

Eph. 5:21: **Submitting to one another in the fear of Christ**

Scholarly debate regarding the relationship of this verse to the HT has revolved around the “unresolved tension between authority and mutuality”⁶⁸ which its unique formulation engenders. At the root of the discussion lies the judgment as to whether this injunction found in 5:21(calling for mutual submission) is in fundamental conflict with the

shows *variae lectiones* in the reversed order of vv. 20-21, however. Though supported by p46, D, F and G, the reversed order makes little sense, and leaves verse 22 without a predicate. The traditional reading is well attested by Sinaiticus, A, B, D², Ψ and the majority text. M. Gielen, *Tradition und Theologie neutestamentlicher Haustafelthik*, Athenaeums Monografien: Bonner Biblische Beiträge (Frankfurt: Hain, 1990), 206, fn. 6, postulates a scribal error due to familiarity with the Col. text.

⁶⁵ E. Kamlah, “Υποτάσσεισθαι in den NT Haustafeln,” in *Verborum Veritas: FS Stählin*, eds. O. Böcher and K. Haacker (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 1970), 238, cites the uniqueness of this HT emphasis: “...im Gebot der Unterordnung ein Spezifikum der urchristlichen Haustafel liege; denn in keiner anderen ähnlichen Ermahnung, wie sie sich in Texten der stoisch beeinflussten Popularphilosophie und des hellenistischen Judentums finden, ist es auch nur belegt, von einer derart dominierenden Rolle ganz zu schweigen.”

⁶⁶ Contra S. Tanzer, “Submerged Traditions of Sophia: Ephesians,” in *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Commentary*, ed. E. Schüssler-Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1994), vol. 2, 341, who follows Munro's arguments closely, seeing the previous material as “clumsily attached to the household code.”

⁶⁷ Mutual submission is unique to the Eph. HT; the fear of Christ is found only here in the NT.

⁶⁸ Best, *Ephesians*, 517, engages the discussion thoughtfully, and rightly points out this fundamental tension.

following HT admonitions (clearly unilateral commands, including submission and obedience), or in some way can be understood to explicate, expand, or perhaps mediate the fundamental injunctions to the three relational pairs. In either case, the tension needs to be considered from several possible perspectives. If a conflict has indeed been created, then we might allow for unintentional discrepancy in logic on the part of the author (with no discernible intention), or conversely, suggest a scenario in which he might have intended to create such a tension. Finally, it may be that the author sensed the tension created by this formulation, yet chose, nonetheless, to retain it as an integral part of his larger theological redaction.

In the first instance, the author may have *unwittingly* created an antithetical conflation of material present in Col. Reciprocal injunctions containing reflexive pronouns⁶⁹ stood in relatively close proximity to the Col. HT (3:9, “not lying to one another”; the reciprocal formulations and sense of 3:13, “forbearing one another and forgiving one another...for as the Lord has forgiven you, so also you [should forgive]”; not to mention the obvious influence of the reflexive pronoun in 3:16, “in all wisdom teaching and admonishing each other.” These might have led the author to create another reciprocal construction (complementing the reflexive pronoun in Eph. 5:19?), by employing “submitting,” not indiscriminately, but as it came to mind as the first verbal expression of the Col. HT.⁷⁰ The two influences were consciously drawn upon by the author, without an awareness of the tensions created. This scenario seems unlikely, however. The construction makes a clever connection between preceding verbal forms and the HT theme of submission, which seems to preclude undeliberated or unintentional formulation. It is more likely that the author is indeed extending the reciprocal ethic found in both letters, making similar and conscious use of the reciprocal constructions found in Col., as well as extending similar constructions employed in the parenthesis of Ephesians. This deliberate construction looks back to the preceding material, whereas “submitting” and the phrase “in the fear of Christ” (overlooked in this connection) *anticipate* the HT. Here we would agree with Gese’s thesis that in Ephesians, style is dependent, intricate and conscious:

Since the author is consciously reformulating at this point [Eph. 5:14 and 6:18-20], the blend must be intentional. It

⁶⁹ ἀλλήλους and ἀλλήλων.

⁷⁰ So Best, *Ephesians*, 517.

cannot be attributed to stylistic clumsiness, but has its basis in the textual context. It is apparent that the author wishes to connect the larger message of relationship to God with human relationships via stylistic cues. That means that the author is attempting to mark theological elements and relationships with grammatical structures.⁷¹

Whereas “submitting” introduces a familiar HT theme initiating the Col. HT, 5: 21b lends further support to the deliberate nature of the formulation. The motivational phrase found here, “in the fear of Christ,”⁷² is a unique collocation in NT usage, meriting special attention. The unusual phrase suggests that the author was not unconscious of his formulation, but was actually introducing something important and new, to be developed, or at least represented, in the following parenetic material: the motivation of fear, which finds a new Christian aspect in the person of Christ.⁷³ This observation is borne out on both counts in the attendant HT material. The author develops the concept of fear within the HT in 5:33, “and that the wife fear her husband”⁷⁴ and 6:5, “with fear and trembling”, as well as making nearly exclusive use of Christ (a notable departure from Col.) as the

⁷¹ M. Gese, *Das Vermächtnis des Apostels: Die Rezeption der paulinischen Theologie im Epheserbrief*, eds. O. Hofius and M. Hengel, *WUNT*, vol. 99 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 99.

⁷² The last word of this formulation, Χριστοῦ, has competing textual variants: F, G read Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ; D reverses this; K and bo-mss read κυρίου; 6. 81. 614. 630. 1881. *pm* Cl and Ambst-mss read θεοῦ. An overwhelming majority of the texts, including substantial witnesses, support the adopted reading. Its unusual (and therefore difficult) formulation, also speaks for its originality. The first two variants can be explained as attempts to achieve clarity and completeness of the more familiar title of Christ; the second two variants reflect common NT usage (Lk. 18:2, 4; 23:40; Ac. 9:31; 10:2, 22, 35; 13:16, 26; Rom. 3:18; 2Cor. 5:11; 7:1; Col. 3:22, 1Pet. 2:17; Rev. 11:18; 14:7; 19:5), as well as OT influences already noted in Col. (See Gielen, *Tradition*, 170f., Best, *Ephesians*, 518).

⁷³ The traditional OT formulation φόβος κυρίου, is prominent in wisdom literature and the Psalms as a fundamental aspect of wise and ethical behaviour, upon which the author, in the tradition of Col., draws (see Balz and Wanke’s article, “φοβέω κτλ” in *TDNT*, 9, 189-219). The author of Eph., by the substitution of Χρίστος for κύριος, intentionally introduces a specifically Christian aspect to the HT ethic.

⁷⁴ Most commentators agree that 5:33 comprises an inclusio; Best’s observation, *Ephesians*, 516, that this should actually occur at 6:9, is correct; the two occurrences, however, are more than accidental, as he suggests.

title for the Lord in 5:25, 29; 6:5, 6.⁷⁵ The novelty of the phrase, as well as its considerable representation in the HT, suggest that the author constructed the verse in a most meticulous and innovative manner to imply a close connection between the general parenthesis and that of the HT.

If we allow, then, the construction to be deliberate in nature, might it be held that it represents an intentional conflict? This position has been posited by Sampley, who understands 5:21 as “the author’s critique of the basic stance of the Haustafel form wherein one group is ordered to be submissive to another group vested with authority over it.”⁷⁶ This position seems to be unlikely in light of the expansions within the HT, which appear to develop the HT ethic, rather than diminish its authoritative nature.⁷⁷ If the intention of the author had been to discredit the HT, then we must agree with Best: “...he would have made this clearer.”⁷⁸

If 5:21 is not to be construed as being in conflict with the HT material, it remains to be shown in what manner its singular injunction of mutual submission in the fear of the Lord represents a new development, and how this relates to the HT admonitions. It may be that the apparent lack of clarity between the general admonition found in 5:21 and the particular HT injunctions can be explained in terms of the author’s editorial activity and intentions. The discrepancy simply may be the result of the author’s redactional attempts to preserve and conflate the most important, uniquely Christian elements of the Col. HT form (including the full expression of reciprocity, the theme of submission and the motivation given to the slaves in the prominent slave-master relationship, “in singleness of heart, fearing the Lord”), in an attempt to construe the most Christianized ethic possible.

⁷⁵ The only exception is the word-play created by the opposition of κύριοι and κύριος, which the author necessarily retains in 6:9.

⁷⁶ J. P. Sampley, *“And the Two Shall Become One Flesh”: A Study of Traditions in Eph. 5:21-33* (Cambridge: CUP, 1971), 117.

⁷⁷ One would not expect the HT to expand to twice the size of the Col. HT, nor to include elements which appear to add stronger or even absolute nature to the admonitions to the subordinated members: cf. 5:22, where the women are called to submit, not as is fitting in the Lord (Col. 3:18), but ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ (v.22) and ἐν παντί. To this is added the imagery of male headship after the model of Christ. Children are admonished to obey *and* to honour parents, with OT support (Dt. 5:16, v. 6:3). Slaves are to obey with φόβου καὶ τρόμου, 6:5.

⁷⁸ Best, *Ephesians*, 516.

It appears that v. 21 introduces the theme of submission in a broader, and perhaps more nuanced form,⁷⁹ yet traditional relationships, it must be said, remain intact, their subordinate/superordinate characteristics firmly in place.⁸⁰ The familiar discussion over the interpretation of this verse in terms of either mutual submission or support of the HT mandates may not adequately encompass the original concerns of the author, who has, we believe, intentionally taken the Eph. HT in a new direction. A possible point of understanding this innovation presents itself in its point of departure: the expanded slave-master section of the Col. HT. The Col. HT ethic builds upon the general understanding within the letter that believers stand in a redeemed relationship to Christ, which is analogous to the master-servant relationship found in the HT. Paul and his hearers, for this reason, share a certain level of solidarity with the slaves addressed in the HT. The admonitions and christological motivation enjoined to the slaves are particularly significant for the general reader, if not paradigmatic for the Christian life. The centrality of the slave-master parenthesis in determining the Col. HT ethic would not have escaped the attention of the writer of Ephesians, who would have closely scrutinized the theological motivation contained within the notable expansions found in the slave-master instruction. It is important, then, to note that Col. 3:22b introduces the *singular* motivation for the slave's activities as the fear of the Lord.⁸¹ It would not be surprising, then, if the author of Ephesians were to incorporate faithfully this central theme into his own HT, giving it an appropriately prominent and congruent position of regulating motivation, yet for *all* the HT admonitions. The unique formulation "in the fear of Christ" departs

⁷⁹ Franz Mußner, *Der Brief an die Epheser*, eds. E. Gräßer and K. Kertelge, Ökumenischer Taschenbuchkommentar zum Neuen Testament, vol. 10 (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1982), 154, notes the specifically Christian aspect of the familiar term as encountered in the HT: "Die neuen Kontexte, in die im Neuen Testament die Haustafeln gestellt sind, wie besonders im Epheserbrief, verschieben auch die Semantik übernommener Lexeme wie 'unterwerfen'."

⁸⁰ Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, ed. D.A. Carson, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 402, notes that the attempts to construe v.21 in an egalitarian manner do not correspond to normal usage of ὑποτάσσομαι, nor to the reality of the HT. See also Gielen, *Tradition*, 223.

⁸¹ φοβούμενοι τὸν κύριον. This can be construed as the general rubric under which behaviour is regulated, as well as the appropriate response to the rewards (punishments being omitted in the Eph. redaction) promised. In this regard, the fear of the Lord regulates the masters' behaviour, as well.

slightly from the Colossian formulation in its notable use of Christ as an alternative title for Lord.⁸² This may reflect a borrowing from the unusual christological title found in the Col. slave parenthesis in 3:24, “the Lord Christ”, the expanded admonitions of Col. again exercising a strong influence upon the Eph. author’s choice of words. Verse 21 would, then, not only reflect the earlier christological motivation incorporated in Col., but also represent a conflation of the Col. HT’s vocabulary with its special use of the title of Christ.⁸³ It appears that the author of Ephesians has not only inserted v. 21 with the intention of creating a smooth transition, but also to establish, from the beginning, the central motivating element of the HT, which builds upon the uniquely Christian elements of the Col. HT.⁸⁴

V. 21, then, represents an important theological and motivational guiding principle, as well as an organizational shift in the HT form.⁸⁵ Here the author expands the regulating force of the fear of the Lord (implicit in Col., yet formally limited to the slave-master relation), by explicit inclusion of *all* relations within the HT under its rubric.⁸⁶ The fear of the Lord becomes the overarching theological touchstone for

⁸² The title *kurios*, used eight times in reference to Christ in the Col. HT, is reduced to five occurrences (omitting the doubtful insertion of *kurios* in 29b) in Eph., these following the usage of Col. in the slave-master relation in 6:7 [Col.3:23], 6:8 [Col. 3:24], 6:9 [Col. 4:1], as well as reflecting the vocabulary of the instruction to the wives in 5:22 [Col. 3:18]. The fifth occurrence, 6:4, qualifies the nature of the instruction (ἐν παιδείᾳ καὶ νοουθεσίᾳ κυρίου). The author tends to employ the title of Christ (used only once in Col. HT) in the Eph. HT: 5:21, 23, 24, 25, 29, 32; 6:5, 6.

⁸³ Verses 3:22b (motivation φοβούμενοι τὸν κύριον) and 3:24b (title τῷ κυρίῳ Χριστῷ) representing both central and unique elements of the Col. HT, which might have influenced the author’s formulation of this motivational rubric.

⁸⁴ Here Gielen, *Tradition*, 233, sees the call to mutual submission as paradigmatic, replacing the *kurios-doulos* relationship of Col.: “Der Aufruf zur gegenseitigen Unterordnung ist also nichts anderes als die auf die zwischenmenschlichen Relationen übertragene Forderung, dem Herrn zu dienen.”

⁸⁵ Contra Schweizer, *Der Brief an die Kolosser*, Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament (Zürich: Benziger Verlag, 1976), 246, who characterises the Eph. HT as having “die gleiche Reihenfolge, die gleiche Intention.”

⁸⁶ Gielen, *Tradition*, 218f., notes that the “überraschende Schlußperspektive” found in the slave-master relation of Col. HT loses its original function, and becomes the assumed beginning point in Eph. In this manner, the surprising and unique christological perspective is extended to all relations.

regulating HT relations, the person of Christ its mediating authority. The author of Ephesians, then, not only introduces a significant change in the HT *form* and a homogenizing of its *motivation* to all its relations, but gives us this important signal for the interpretation of the following relations as well. The combination of conscious alterations, borrowed vocabulary, and stylistic craft evidenced in v.21 should not be underestimated when weighing its significance to the understanding of the following HT material. Correspondingly, if our analysis is correct, it would appear that the Col.-Eph. sequence of redaction provides a potential explanation for an unusual formulation.

Conclusion

Arguments tendered for the priority of Colossians (regardless of the authorship issue) appear to provide the least complicated scenario of redaction, while offering cogent explanations for similarities and variations⁸⁷ found in both letters. Mitton's thorough analysis of the

⁸⁷ In nearly every instance, the material designated as unique to the Ephesian redaction can be shown to reveal a significant influence from Colossian vocabulary. These sections evidence an affinity with a number of Col. texts, including several citations from texts which appear above as unique to the Col. letter: Eph. 1:3-14 contains phrases from Col. 1:9, 13, 16, 20, 22 and 3:16; Eph. 2:1-10 echoes Col. 1:10; 2:13 and 3:7; Eph. 3:14-21 incorporates terminology from Col. 1:16, 20, 23, 27; 2:7, 9; Eph. 4:1-16 shows borrowings from Col. 1:10; 3:12, 14; the HT expansion in Eph. 5:22-32 reveals elements taken from Col. 1: 18, 22, 28; finally, Eph. 6:10-17 incorporates one element of the Christ hymn, Col. 1:16. It should be noted that in these sections, several Col. texts appear more than once (Col. 1:9 [2x], 10 [2x], 16 [3x], 20 [2x], 22[2x]), suggesting the *expanded* use of the Col. text by the Eph. redactor. Elements of the Christ hymn (Col. 1:15-20), remarkably, appear five times throughout Ephesians in 1:7, 10; 3:15; 5:23; 6:12. All of these instances are found in segments of Ephesians which do not correspond to the Col. text. If the Col. author had redacted these sections (most of the material is fully omitted), it is unlikely such disparate and highly edited segments would produce a passage of such beauty and cohesion as the Christ hymn. More probable is the Eph. borrowing of this central passage to inform thanksgiving, prayer, the HT and the passage on spiritual warfare. Col. 1:22 provides another example of a central theological passage which finds expression in the Ephesian expansions of the Eulogy (Eph. 1:4) and the HT (Eph. 5:27). It appears likely that the Eph. author has taken this central theme and applied it to two of his expansions, including metaphorical use in 5:27; to suggest a Col. redaction which deletes the surrounding material of Ephesians, yet manages to extricate this passage, limit its meaning and press it into the concise and balanced formulation found in Col. 1:21-22, would be strained.

literary relationship, though not in all points incontrovertible, remains convincing in terms of sheer evidence (particularly his observations regarding conflation and tenability). Here we would agree with Merklein that Ephesians represents, particularly in its parenesis, a “Rezeption” of the Colossian material, encompassing “Interpretation, Innovation und Transformation”.⁸⁸ Until more convincing arguments can be marshalled to support competing theories, it appears that the traditional view of the dependent literary relationship of Eph. upon Col. offers the exegete the most fruitful starting point for the examination of the letters’ theological development.

⁸⁸ Merklein, “Rezeption”, 196, points out that the process of “Rezeption”, which involves significant transformation, can be seen especially clearly in the HT. Gese, *Vermächtnis*, 109, sums up well: “Viel wesentlicher als die Entscheidung dieser Alternative [priority-dependence] ist jedoch die Beobachtung, daß mit der Rezeption des Kolosserbriefes im Epheserbrief zugleich eine theologische Weiterentwicklung einhergeht. Es zeigt sich nämlich, daß die aus dem Kolosserbrief übernommenen Wendungen nicht einfach nur wiederholt, sondern zugleich charakteristisch umgeformt werden.” Following Schnackenburg, he speaks of a “Perspektivenwechsel” and a “einheitliches Umformungsprinzip.” Following Schnackenburg, he speaks of a “Perspektivenwechsel” and a “einheitliches Umformungsprinzip.”