For almost 120 years, reconstruction of the Colossian opposition has focused on sources outside the NT.\(^1\) Lightfoot drew on the Gnostic and Second Temple Jewish texts available at the time.\(^2\) Dibelius’ Gnostic proposal brought Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* and the inscriptions from the Apollo sanctuary at Claros to bear on the problem,\(^3\) while Bornkamm’s reformulation of the Gnostic proposal as Jewish Gnosticism included comparisons to the *Book of Elchasai* and the *Pseudo-Clementines*.\(^4\) In keeping with this trend, the discoveries of the Nag Hammadi and Qumran texts fueled new proposals for the Colossian opponents as either Gnostic, Jewish Gnostic, or “purely” Jewish.\(^5\) Recent proposals have focused on careful re-evaluations of the existing outside evidence. First, a number of scholars have located the Colossian opponents in ascetic-mystical strands of ancient Judaism, drawing on apocalyptic and revelatory texts such as *1 Enoch* and *2 Baruch* for comparison.\(^6\) Second, several scholars have placed the opponents in the context of Anatolian syncretistic religious culture and constructed a “text” of evidence from cultic practices in Asia, practices that include both Greek and Jewish influences.\(^7\) Third, scholars have used texts such as Diogenes Laertes’ *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* to attach the opponents in the letter to a specific Greco-Roman philosophical school.\(^8\) These different approaches, with their attendant sets of comparative texts, represent the major areas of research on the Colossian errorists.\(^9\) No one course has carried the field; all five of these approaches remain well-represented in current research.\(^10\)

This paper brings a hitherto unexamined text in the history of Colossians’ research in support of the apocalyptic construal of the opposition. While I draw on Francis’ work,
this proposal diverges from his and others’ Jewish mystical-ascetic solution because the

text chosen for comparison is another text from the NT, the Apocalypse of John. The

proposal is that Revelation provides a social-historical, theological, and ideological
anchor for the reconstruction of the Colossian opponents. There are strong literary and
historical grounds for this comparison, to be discussed below. As an apocalypse, the

Book of Revelation shares a number of motifs with revelatory literature such as 1 Enoch
and 2 Baruch.

This proposal of a specifically Christian context for the opponents raises two
important methodological issues to be considered before delving into historical and
exegetical details. First, any reconstruction of the Colossians situation must include a
plausible context in which the opposing groups would actually meet.\textsuperscript{11} Christian groups
and teachers would be the most likely dialogue partners in a Christian dispute over
matters of theology and praxis in the first century CE. We have far more evidence of
intramural Christian polemic in first-century texts than we do that non-Christians were
taking any notice of the new communities.\textsuperscript{12} While there has been a strong tendency
since Lightfoot to identify the Colossian opponents as some combination of Jews,
Gnostics, or Hellenistic philosophers, the most likely conversation partners within the
Christian community, and hence the targets of polemic, would be other Christians. The
NT epistles and Acts provide solid evidence not only for the constant interaction among
early Christian communities but also for the regular disturbances caused when traveling
Christian teachers introduced new teachings into communities.\textsuperscript{13}
Second, construing the polemic in the letter as part of an intramural Christian conflict calls into question the othering of the Colossian errorists. Casting Jewish, Gnostic, or pagan groups as the “enemy” within a canonized text without first considering Christian groups reads the polemical interactions of the earliest Christian communities within the narrow ideological confines of the canon. Othering the opponents presupposes that Colossians expresses a “pure” form of proto-orthodox Christianity. The opponents would perforce be heterodox, if not heretical. If not Jewish or Gnostic “heretics” or “errorists,” the author’s opponents could also be “syncretistic,” again with the implication that the author, usually Paul himself, expresses “pure” Christianity. For instance Clinton Arnold, a recent proponent of a fully developed theory of “syncretistic” origins for the opponents, notes that the “designation [ie, syncretistic] is descriptive insofar as the competing teaching represents a blending of variety of religious traditions.” But this is a description of all the “Christianities” of the NT, including that of the author of Colossians. Early Christianity combined elements of Second Temple Judaism (itself highly diverse and syncretistic), Greco-Roman religions, Hellenistic philosophy, and native religio-magical elements. Since it is equally descriptive for all the Christianities that developed in Asia Minor during the first two centuries of the common era, the term “syncretistic” does not function with any precision when delineating the opposing groups referred to in the epistle. Removing the restrictive lense of NT canonization texts and the attendant view of “pure Christianity” further strengthens the hypothesis that the opponents in Colossae were also in fact Christians, albeit as syncretistic as the author.
This proposal, moreover, is based on strong historical evidence. This paper argues that Colossians was written by a follower of Paul in response to the introduction of apocalyptic strains of Christianity from Palestine into the Lycus Valley in the aftermath of the Jewish war with Rome in 66–70 CE. The debate between "Paul" (a name chosen to enhance the authority of his position) and apocalyptic Christian prophets has a theological, moral, and an ideological dimension. The theological debate centers on the realized achievements of Christ and the relation of Christians to angels and other heavenly and earthly powers; thus, the author of Colossians argues Christology at length. The moral argument focuses on the observance of Jewish law and customs, such as Sabbaths, new moon festivals, and dietary requirements. There are important ideological underpinnings for these moral and theological issues. The author of the Apocalypse arrived in Asia after the Jewish-Roman war, "dwelling on visions" and describing heavenly angels. His charismatic, prophetic authority challenged the emerging Pauline church hierarchy, whose authority derived from received tradition rather than charismatic revelation. Revelation 2–3 contains significant evidence of disputes between the author John and the Asian Christian communities over matters of interpretation and praxis.17 John’s apocalyptic visions were controversial from their introduction into Asia through their eventual reception into the canon.18

This historical argument rests upon three assumptions about Revelation. First, the author of the Apocalypse, the seer John of Patmos, was an itinerant, charismatic prophet who came to Asia from Palestine after the destruction of Jerusalem by the
Romans.\textsuperscript{19} He was the leader of a prophetic group, which probably included Christians from Palestine as well some recruited in Asia, and was known to at least the seven Asian churches addressed in Revelation and probably more.\textsuperscript{20} Second, a number of formal features and theological motifs in the Apocalypse show contact with Pauline traditions.\textsuperscript{21} Third, the final text of the Apocalypse as we have it today was composed in stages, beginning perhaps as early as the 60s and reaching its final form at the end of the first-century.\textsuperscript{22} These stages are important because of the assumed date for Colossians. The author of Revelation was active as a prophet in Asia at least twenty years before the final form of the Apocalypse circulated among Christian communities. While I assume non-Pauline authorship and a relatively late date for Colossians, it is not necessary to push the letter all the way to the 90s in order to postulate contact between the Pauline school represented by Colossians and the apocalyptic Christianity brought to Asia by John.\textsuperscript{23} Colossians is a response not to the Apocalypse itself but to the prophetic activity of John and his followers, who were dwelling on their visions of heavenly worship within the Asian Christian communities.

I.

Literary parallels alone suggest a comparison of Colossians and Revelation. Rev 1:5 and 3:14 include phrases that almost certainly refer to either the actual Christ Hymn in Col 1:15–20 or the Christological traditions behind the hymn. The key phrases from
Colossians both contain the word δυναμοι έτει ο, “firstborn.” Christ is called δυναμοι έτει in Col 1:15 and Ἰ ὑπ, δυναμοι έτει in Col 1:18. In Rev 1:5, in what is essentially the epistolary prescript of the Apocalypse, John sends grace and peace to the seven churches of Asia "from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead [δυναμοι έτει ο], and the ruler [ὁ χειριστὴς] of the kings of the earth." Then, in the opening of the prophetic message to Laodicea in Rev 3:14, Christ announces to the Laodiceans that "these are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God's creation [ὁ άληθιος ὁ αμαρτιώτων ἐξ ἀρχῆς]." The diction of the phrases in Colossians and Revelation is too close and too infrequent elsewhere in the NT to allow for coincidental overlap. Ἰ δυναμοι έτει ο occurs only in these three verses in the NT (Col 1:15, 18; Rev 1:5). Ἰ δυναμοι is found most frequently in Paul (Rom 1:20, 25; 8:19, 20, 21, 22, 39; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15), but in our two texts, only in Col 1:15, 23 and Rev 3:14.

Furthermore, Colossae was only ten miles from Laodicea and the two churches were closely associated. Col 4:12–16 describes close associations between the churches of the Lycus valley (see also 2:1). Epaphras (συνοικισμος of the author, Col 1:7) has worked in the nearby churches of Hierapolis and Laodicea as well (4:13). The Colossians apparently know the members of the church at Laodicea, including the woman who supports the church, Nympha (4:15). The author’s command to send this letter on to Laodicea to be read in Nympha’s church and to read another letter to the Laodiceans (Col 4:16) implies that the issues at stake for the author in Colossae and Laodicea are the same.
These close literary parallels combined with the geographical proximity of Laodicea and Colossae indicate that the author of Revelation was aware of the Christ Hymn and thus almost certainly other teachings of the Colossian church. There were obviously shared traditions, such as baptismal traditions, among the Christian churches of the Lycus valley in Asia Minor. R. H. Charles notes that it is significant that these references in Revelation occur only in the message to Laodicea, one of Colossae’s sister churches. But it is more significant that these shared phrases appear in Revelation in a polemical context. Rev 3:14–22 is one of several places in Revelation where we see evidence of deep ideological divisions within the churches of Asia. In this message, wealth is the presenting issue for the ideological conflict between “Christ” (as mouthpiece for the implied author) and the church. While the Laodiceans claim to be rich (πλοῦσιος) and in need of nothing (οὐδὲν χρείαν ἔχων), Christ responds that they are really poor (πτωχός), blind, wretched, pitiable, and naked (Rev 3:17). The Laodiceans probably were wealthy, most likely from commercial activity. The author of the Apocalypse takes a strongly negative view of the Laodicean attitude toward their wealth. Material wealth has lead, in John’s view, to complacency with their spiritual state as well, as indicated by Rev 3:15–16, in which “Christ” condemns the church for its lack of commitment. While the Laodiceans are not condemned for tolerating opposing teachers (cf. Rev 2:14–15, 20–23), they have not in John’s view committed themselves fully to the difficult struggles against the Romans, Jews, and opposing Christians that the author understands to be central to the Christian life (cf. Rev 1:9). The Laodicean
spiritual complacency, which was based on their material wealth, could also be construed as over-realized eschatology; we could thus read Rev 3:17 as an eschatological argument. A close parallel can be found in Paul’s ironic chiding of the Corinthians in 1 Cor 4:8. While it is likely that the Laodicean’s eschatological views differed sharply from John’s, it is difficult to imagine the lukewarm Laodiceans as spiritual enthusiasts on the order of the rowdy Corinthians. Wealth and complacency, not enthusiasm, are the central moral issues in Rev 3:14–22.

Colossians uses the same type of wealth imagery and expresses the eschatological viewpoint that John attacks in the message to Laodicea, the sister church of Colossae. First, the author writes that God has made known (γνωρίσας) to the “nations” the "riches [δυνάμεις ὑμῶν] of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you” (1:27). Second, the author expresses his desire that everyone in Colossae, Laodicea, and “all who have not seen me face to face” (Col 2:2) would have “all the riches [δυνάμεις δυνάμεις ὑμῶν] of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God’s mystery, that is, Christ himself.” In Christ, furthermore, all the "treasures" (εὐλογίας) of wisdom and knowledge are hidden (Col 2:3). Finally, in the exhortation in 3:16, the author implores his audience to “let the word of Christ [God] dwell in you richly [εὐλογίας]" Paul tends to use the language of wealth as a metaphor for divine mercy, kindness, or forgiveness. In Colossians, by contrast, there is a very strong connection between knowledge and wealth in the letter. A wide variety of cognitive language surrounds the wealth language in these passages. In all of these passages this “wealth” of knowledge is a realized possession of the
Colossians; God “has enabled” (ἰκανόσαμαντί) them to share in this inheritance of heavenly wealth and knowledge (1:12; cf. 1:5). Christ has been revealed (ἐφανέρωθη, 1:26); knowledge of this mystery of God is While the wealth imagery in Colossians describes a benefit already in the possession of the audience, Revelation presents this entirely in the future. Christ counsels the Laocideans to buy gold from him that they might be truly rich (πλοῦτος, Rev 3:18) and John describes a glorious vision of wealth, the opulent city of the New Jerusalem, that Christians "will inherit"


The shared literary and theological motifs in Revelation and Colossians call for a more careful comparison of the two texts. These parallels between Colossians and Revelation occur in a polemical context. Both texts are focused on the negative construction of a Christian opponent who presents a theological, moral, and ideological challenge to the author. The wealth imagery in both Colossians and the message to Laodicea points to eschatology as a major point of controversy between the author of Colossians and his charismatic-apocalyptic opponents. The intertextuality shows the points of the contact; the theology and morality of the two texts show ample room for opposition.
II.

The next task is to show correspondences between the opponents, as we can best discern them in Colossians, and the apocalyptic Christianity presented in Revelation. In examining the “polemical core” (Col 2:8–23), we find that there is not as much detail about what the opponents propose as about what the author disagrees with. While Col 2:8 has traditionally been the exegetical crux of the description of the opponents for scholars, interpretation of this verse has often run to atomistic analysis that ignores the rhetoric of the letter. As I argue below, the rhetorical placement of 2:9–15 between the two main polemical passages (2:8 and 2:16–23) shows that the issues raised in 2:9–15 are central to the debate between the author and his opponents. Furthermore, Col 1:24–2:7 leads up to and provides important background for the full-scale attack in 2:8. While we should not necessarily try to find information about the opponents behind every line of Colossians, ignoring the rhetorical arrangement of the letter runs the risk of missing both the subtlety and force of the author’s polemic. Exegesis of this verse and its problematic terms (in particular τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου) therefore need to be placed within rhetorical context.

The author begins his argument against the opponents with an indirect reference in 2:4 that anticipates the two major theological points of debate, Christology and eschatology. To step back, Col 2:4–5 wraps up the “autobiographical” section in Col 1:24–2:5, in which the implied author takes on the persona of Paul. He writes of his
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suffering (ἐν τοῖς παθήμασιν) and struggle (ἀγών) “for your sake” (ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, 1:24, 2:1); this “you” includes not only the Colossians but the Laodiceans and “all who have not seen me face-to-face” (Col 2:1; cf. εἰ γὰρ καὶ τῇ σαρκὶ ἄπειμι, 2:5). We see here in narrative terms the construction of an implied audience by an author drawing on the historical Paul’s authority, an audience that extends to churches both geographically and chronologically distant from the implied author. Col 2:2–3 expresses the wish of the author that the post-Pauline church in Asia, that is "all who have not seen me face-to-face," might have "all the riches of assured understanding" (δὲ οἴδας ὅ ἐστιν τὸ σοφὸν δόξα τοῦ θεοῦ) and the "knowledge" (ἡγεῖ] ὅ ὁ) of God’s mystery, that is, Christ. This language has clear social functions for the post-Pauline church. It also conveys a fully realized eschatology in conjunction with a high Christology. Col 2:3 develops the Christology further: in Christ "all [πάντες again] treasuries of wisdom and knowledge" are hidden (ὅ δὲ ἡ μνήμη τῆς σοφίας καὶ τῆς γνώσεως 2:3). This long sentence (Col 2:1–3) describes Christ’s identity as the revealed mystery of God (cf.1:25–26) who provides access to God and to all wisdom and knowledge, a reference back to the fuller description of Christ in the hymn (1:15–18; cf. also 1:5, 13). The author is clear that all glory and knowledge reside in Christ and that the mystery has been fully, not partially, revealed to the Colossians and all the “saints.”

The point of Col 1:24–2:4 is considerable different if read as a polemical response to apocalyptic Christian prophets rather than a Gnostic philosophy or Jewish syncretists. The author does not want the listeners to be swayed by other Christian teachers who
present a more limited view of what Christ has accomplished. The focus on the Christian community's access to all of God's hidden mysteries, wisdom and knowledge in Christ has a specific rhetorical purpose in the argument against this opposition. The issue at stake is not the validity of Christ as opposed to some other teaching, but rather, does Christ in fact provide full access to all the riches (δῆθι δεῖ ὑ였 ὦ) and full knowledge (ῥημα τοῦ ὅγο) of God's mysteries? If all the treasuries of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ, have they been fully revealed or do fuller heavenly revelations await? The argument here is not "Christ vs. something else" but rather different views of who Christ is and what Christ has accomplished. The author emphatically connects the Christological and eschatological statements in 2:2–3 with the warning against those who "deceive by plausible arguments" (δαναεὶ ἄρκας  ὃς ὅπερ ἔκακος ἔτη ἔκακος, note the Τοῦτο λέγω, ὅνα, 2:4). The arguments of his opponents are πιθανολογία, persuasive but false, because they take place within the domain of Christian theology.

The phrase παραλογίζεται ἐν πιθανολογίᾳ in 2:4 first suggests the apocalyptic opponents. Before continuing with a direct assault, however, the author must lay one more piece of his foundation for the attack: the importance of received tradition. By including and commenting on the Christ Hymn in his letter (Col 1:15–20), the author privileges tradition over revealed knowledge. He even explicitly refers to the value of tradition.43 First, when applying the Christ Hymn to the Colossian situation, the author warns his audience to stay within the boundaries of established faith (ὁὶ ὁς ὁμοέμάτω ὕι ὅ and not to shift from the message of the gospel that they had heard (τοῦ


εὐαγγελίου οὖ ἰκοῦσατε, 1:23). Second, in an even more direct appeal to the importance of tradition (Col 2:6), the author cites established tradition as a warrant and guide for the Christian life (note δάνειαὶ Ἱ(aa)ανα).\(^{44}\) The Colossians are to live their lives in Christ, "rooted and established," "as you have received" (Ὅϊ δάνειαὶ Ἱ(aa)ανα) and "just as you were taught" (ἐὰν, ὑ ὑ ὑ ὑ, 2:6).\(^{45}\) The connection of Col 2:6–7 to what precedes, especially 2:4–5 (note the ὑ ὑ in 2:6), and to what follows in 2:8 and 2:16–23 needs to be emphasized.\(^{46}\) Why this extensive appeal to tradition? Col 1:23 and 2:6–7 suggests that something new has come to the Christian churches of the Lycus Valley in Asia. Tradition functions as an external or “artificial” rhetorical proof for the audience in the face of this perceived threat.\(^{47}\)

In 2:8, the author turns directly to his Christian opponents. The key here is deciding which elements are accurate descriptions of the opponents and which are negative characterizations of the opponents by the author.\(^{48}\) Understanding the structure of the sentence is crucial for this task, since a number of phrases are set in clear opposition to one another. I suggest the following reading:
The structure and syntax of the verse reveals the extent to which it is unified as a polemical and pejorative description of the opponents, rather than an accurate restatement of their positions. The participle óõëáãùã äí, a hunting term meaning capturing or dragging away prey, introduces a negative tone that links 2:8 to the descriptions of the opponents as deceiving (2:4) and having the “appearance” of wisdom (2:23). The author connects öéëïóïößá and êåí, as objects of äéÜ. The juxtaposition of the two words makes it highly unlikely that the opponents identified themselves as a philosophy. Rather, φιλοσοφία is a derogatory term equivalent to "empty deceit." The author fears that the “hunting” opponents will take the audience captive (óõëáãùã äí) by philosophy and deceit when they stalk their prey in Colossae.

Recent studies have taken φιλοσοφία as a self-designation of the errorists. The opponents have thus been identified as Pythagoreans, Cynics, or a syncretistic blend of Hellenistic philosophy which includes some Jewish, Gnostic and "pagan" mystery elements. But there are problems with this interpretation even beyond the exegetical evidence just presented. The word φιλοσοφία had a broad enough range of meanings in
this period so that use of the term does not by necessity imply one of the philosophical 
schools.\textsuperscript{52} It is significant that the word φιλοσοφία is absent from the NT and early
Christian literature before the second-century apologists, with this one exception in Col 
2:8.\textsuperscript{53} Philosophy had unusual or even negative associations within the early Christian 
community, connotations which the author of Colossians draws on here. He certainly 
makes it clear that φιλοσοφία is something to be avoided. Furthermore, these opponents 
(τίς) are not called philosophers. The indefinite pronoun suggests someone with regular 
access to the community; that is, another Christian.\textsuperscript{54} The evidence points to the use of 
φιλοσοφία as part of the derogatory portrayal of this opponents rather than to the 
construal of the opposition as part of a recognizable philosophical school.

In keeping with the overall tone of Col 2:8, the two ἐάν ὅφει phrases that follow are 
polemical and derogatory descriptions of the opponents.\textsuperscript{55} The first phrase describes the 
“philosophy and empty deceit” of the author’s opponents as “human tradition” (ἐὰν ὅφει ὅ- 
received (παραλαμβάνω) rather than according to new prophetic revelations. Since the author has both used traditional material and appealed to tradition as a warrant (Col 1:15–18, 23; 2:6–7), calling his opponents' teaching human tradition has a particularly strong negative force. "Someone" who brings to Colossae new and therefore "human" traditions does not teach ἔαδε ×νόουί. This rhetoric recurs: the opponents are "puffed up with a fleshly mind" (ἐκθέμενοι ἐντολέαν, Col 2:18) while their regulations (ὑπομάχι) are "human teachings" (ἀναστασία ἐνθεύ, 2:23). But what makes the rhetoric so effective is that these attacks are paradoxical reversals of the opponents' claims. They claim to have access to heavenly revelations and visions of worshipping angels; the author of Colossians characterizes this as earthly, fleshly, human teaching. Col 2:8 thus contrasts his own established tradition ἔαδε ×νόουί to the opponents' empty, philosophical, deceitful instruction according to human tradition and the elemental spirits.

No phrase in the letter has caused more difficulty or controversy than ὀδόν ὑμῖν ὕμνοι ἔποιή. Bandstra has divided the interpretations into three types: the "principal" interpretation, referring to principles of teaching or instruction in the root sense of στοιχεῖα as a row, line, or series, a sense which also includes the letters of the alphabet; the "cosmological," in which the phrase is understood as referring to the elements of the material world—earth, water, air, fire; and the "personalized-cosmological," in which the phrase refers to spiritual beings. The argument here does not depend upon any one interpretation. The apocalyptic worldview in Revelation allows for any of the three
possibilities. Indeed, the controversy surrounding the phrase gives ambiguity a peculiar strength over precision! The "principal" interpretation fits well with the apocalyptic-mystical view of the Colossian opponents and also allows for a double-entendre on the numerological speculation based on letters found in Rev 13:16. The sort of “wisdom” (σοφία, Rev 13:18) that produced the numerology or _gematria_ for the "number of the name of the Beast" could be taken as an example of teaching according to the οδη ἐσαράνδη ἔι ἔι ὑμὴ ὑ. But there are also cosmological forces at work in the Apocalypse and successions of angels between John and God in the heavenly throne room, such as the four living creatures (Rev 4:6–8) and the multitude of angels (5:11; 7:9), suggesting a "personalized-cosmological" view. Nor does the Apocalypse prohibit the strictly cosmological interpretation. Angels in the Apocalypse control the four basic elements of the universe—earth, wind, water, and fire—as they bring about judgment upon the earth (see Rev 6:12–17; 7:1; 8:5; 12:15–16; and 16:3–21). The Apocalypse reveals a true awareness of the "power of the Cosmos," as Eduard Schweizer described the ancient sense of οδη ἐσαράνδη.

While it is not necessary to choose one interpretation to connect the Colossian opponents to a Christian apocalyptic group—nor should any construction depend entirely on the construal of στοιχεία—it is clear that the context of the phrase is polemical and the meaning, for the author, derogatory. This phrase recalls Galatians—Christians have been freed from τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου according to Paul (Gal 4:3, 9). Because Paul uses the term and because the author of Colossians adheres to the Pauline tradition, the
word probably has the Galatians’ sense of either controlling spiritualized elements or
principles of religious instruction (note also πλήρωμα, Gal 4:4). Given the Pauline
usage, moreover, it is almost certainly not a self-designation of the opponents, any more
than are “empty deceit,” “human tradition,” or “philosophy.” For the author the
opponents teach an empty and deceitful philosophy that still accords power to the
στοιχεῖα whereas, in his formulation of the Christian παράδοσις, the Colossians have
died to these elemental spirits (Col 2:20). In the rhetoric of Colossians, the "established
faith" frees them from any such concerns.

So too all of Col 2:8 is a polemical description of the opponents. It is a warning
(Âε ὑπακουεῖτε μὴ) not to be taken captive (ὁδοιποτε ἁπάσα) by "empty deceit" (ἐάιν ἵ ὁ ὑπάξει).
Thus, it does not contain any positive descriptions of the opponents or quotations of their
slogans. Rather, it consists of slanderous phrases: philosophy, empty deceit, human
tradition, στοιχεῖα. He contrasts his opponents’ teaching to his teaching "according to
Christ," by which he means a certain set of Pauline theological traditions, in particular
eschatological and Christological formulations, providing the ideological justification for
the church hierarchy.
Col 2:16–23, with its fuller description of the opponents’ positions, offers a better outline of the Colossian opposition than the strongly polemical 2:8. The strong ἐνί of 2:16 introduces a specific list of ethical teachings by "someone" (ἀνᾶ, cf. 2:8) that the recipients of this letter should reject. The two main characteristics of the opponents described in Col 2:16–23 are (1) the observance of some type of Jewish halakah (note δανδάνα, Col 2:6, and ἀμαροε, 2:20) relating to food and the observance of the Sabbath, new moons, and festivals and (2) visionary ascent as a source of authority. Col 2:16–23 begins with the first of these two issues, Jewish-inspired practices and purity rules: "do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink" (Col 2:16). For the author, the opponents’ emphasis on self-denial and asceticism is their most distinguishing characteristic. He returns to it directly twice more in the letter, in Col 2:21 and in 2:23, where he chides them for having the reputation (ἔφαγ) of wisdom "in promoting self-imposed piety [ἀφεοε], humility [ἀδαφε ὑπ ογί, and severe treatment of the body” (ἀπεο ὑπ, 2:23). The strongest characteristic for the author of Colossians also corresponds to the moral code of the Apocalypse, which contains clear condemnation of Christians on matters of food. Christ, speaking prophetically through the author John, condemns two of the churches in Asia (Pergamum and Thyatira) for tolerating the eating of idol-meat and Christian teachers who endorsed the activity (Rev 2:14, 20). Christ also praises the Ephesians for rejecting the teaching of the Nicolaitans (2:6), a teaching which
might have included liberal dietary rules. Those excluded from the New Jerusalem in Rev 21:8 and 22:15, moreover, include idolaters (ἄδικοι ἐν θυσίᾳ), a term which in the Apocalypse both includes those who have violated the sanction against eating meat from the pagan temple as well as people who have worshipped idols.\(^64\) Eating meat from the temples was clearly still a live issue in the Pauline churches addressed by John of Patmos. It was also a source of conflict between John’s apocalyptic-prophetic circle and the leaders in the Pauline churches of Asia. Since the author of Colossians, as part of the leadership maintaining Pauline traditions, holds the view toward idol-meat set forth by Paul in 1 Corinthians and Romans (see 1 Corinthians 8–10; Rom 14:13–15:6), the challenge of John’s visionary rhetoric condemning this practice requires a strong response.

Another aspect of the opponents’ teaching centered on calendar and astronomical phenomenon, “observing festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths.”\(^65\) Here again there is a correspondence between the author’s description of his opponents and Revelation, since the Apocalypse is totally imbued with astronomical and astrological imagery.\(^66\) Many visions in Revelation, including some of the most central, have explicit astronomical imagery. For instance, Jesus appears to John on Patmos holding seven stars in his right hand (ἀστέρας ἐν τῇ ῥαγίᾳ, Rev 1:16).\(^67\) Or again, John sees “in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars” (Rev 12:1).\(^68\) The twelve jewels on the foundations of the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:19–20) may have some connection to the signs of the zodiac.\(^69\) All of this imagery is applied in a
positive manner to Christian figures and symbols (Jesus, the Woman in Heaven, the New Jerusalem). Revelation contains 30 occurrences of ἡλιος, σελήνη, and ἀστήρ alone, while these words are virtually absent from the Pauline and deutero-Pauline corpus.  

Col 2:16, mentioning both food regulations and the Sabbath, indicates some type of a Jewish context for the author's opponents. As noted above, there have been a number of Jewish proposals for the opponents. The definition of Judaism in the late first century should not be too narrow, since it could include any one of the many varieties of Judaism as well as Christianity. The author of Colossians criticizes his opponents for Jewish practices and observances but never calls them directly Jews or accuses them of "judaizing," as does Paul (Gal 2:14). Nevertheless, a close relationship with Judaism is implied; perhaps the opponents claim the title of "the true Jews" or at least consider their beliefs to be the fulfillment of the promises to the Jewish people. This latter possibility corresponds to the identities evoked by the author of the Apocalypse for his implied audience. The messages to Smyrna and Philadelphia portray an intense struggle with other groups over the rights to the title of "Jews." Here, speaking as "Christ," John calls these opponents "so-called Jews" and "the synagogue of Satan" (Rev 2:9; 3:9). The derogatory and polemical description of these other, "false," Jewish groups shows that John and his followers claimed the titles of the "true Jews" and "the true synagogue" for themselves. John and his prophetic circle laid explicit claim to the symbols of Jewish identity. The author of Colossians opposes a group who also lay explicit claim to Jewish
traditions and practices, and thus we have another correspondence between the opponents in Colossians and the Apocalypse.

The second main characteristic of the opposition discernible in Col 2:16–23 is the privileging of apocalyptic visions as a source of authority. The description by the author of Colossians of what his opponents advocate (ἐγκόλοστοι ἐν αἰῶνα ἐν ὑποτασίαν ἀποκάλυψης ὑπάρχουσιν ὑπάρχουσι, ὑπάρχουσι) has caused numerous interpretational difficulties. There is general agreement on ἐγκόλοστοι, a Hebraism that corresponds to יב and means to delight or take pleasure in. The noun חב, which recurs in Col 2:23, clearly marks an aspect of the opponents’ piety. While it basically means “humility,” it is generally accepted that the meaning in Colossians, following the usage in the LXX and the Shepherd of Hermas, has the more specific sense of humbling oneself or even self-mortification. More problematic has been ἐν κόλοστοι ἀποκάλυψης. Scholars, for most of this century at least, have usually interpreted the genitive as objective and assumed the author’s opponents in fact worshiped angels. But Francis’s proposal for reading ἐν κόλοστοι ἀποκάλυψης as a subjective genitive has gained significant support. While grammatically it could go either way, the subjective reading makes significantly more sense in context. The usage has parallels in 4 Macc 5:7 and Jos. Ant. 12.253 and overwhelming evidence in the Jewish and Christian apocalyptic tradition, including Qumran. Although scholars have uncovered evidence for angel worship in Asia during the first two centuries of the common era, it is extremely difficult to imagine any group that actually worships angels to have the sort of access to the Colossian
community implied by Col 2:16–18. The renewal of interest in Second Temple apocalyptic literature over the past 30 years pointed to the heavenly ascent as a central aspect of many Jewish texts during this period. Moreover, this reading fits the immediate context of the two phrases, taking μαζάπαγὺ ἐν its root sense as "entering" without resorting to awkward translations of ἀ εὐρακεν ὑπεντεύων. The author of Colossians can hardly deny the existence of angels or that angels worship God. He can only enjoin against a Christian prophet who makes a heavenly vision of the angels the central focus of the community’s piety.

Revelation contains more references to angels than any other book of the NT. The seven messages in Revelation 2–3 are sent “to the angel” (τῷ ἀγγέλῳ) of each church. Indeed, John takes a position on the genitive in Col 2:18. Twice, apparently as a defense against being characterized as έυί ἐνθοῦσα ἀναδιοριζόμενος ἀαντεύι with an objective genitive, John is spurned by angels for falling at their feet (Rev 19:10; 22:8–10). While this does not need to be a direct response to John’s opponents such as the author of Colossians, it is clear that the author of the Apocalypse wants to avoid charges of angel worship against his prophetic community. But he does describe the worship of angels in the heavenly throne room (Rev 5:2, 11; 7:11–12; 8:2–5; 9:14; 15:5–8; etc.), often in great detail, which he had seen upon entering heaven (Rev 4:1–2). Angels deliver the Apocalypse to John; initiate action on earth; hand John scrolls and give him instructions; interpret visions; and guide John in the New Jerusalem. The heavenly visions and descriptions of angelic worship are more than major literary aspects of the Apocalypse.
For John, these heavenly visions legitimate his role as a prophet and his authority in the church and provide the content of his moral and theological instruction (see Rev 1:19; 5:4–5; 10:8–11; 14:13; 19:10; 21:5; 22:8–10, 16–20). The ascent to heaven described in Revelation 4–22, moreover, was almost certainly not John's first vision. He has established a reputation as a visionary prophet among the seven churches of Asia, including Laodicea, and draws on this reputation in sending the Apocalypse. Thus, his prophetic authority within the Asian Christian communities was based on a long series of visions, probably going back to Palestine, and certainly to the time of the composition of Colossians.

Of equal importance to the content of Col 2:16–23 for understanding the opponents’ teachings is the relationship of the opponents to the Colossian community. The verbs in 2:16 and 2:18 are telling in this regard. The opponents are able to condemn (κρίνω) and disqualify (καταβραβεύω) other Christians in Colossae, Hierapolis, and Laodicea on the basis of whether they eat or drink certain items, celebrate festivals or Sabbaths, or have mystical visions of angels in heaven. It is unlikely that someone outside the Christian community would be able to judge or condemn in the manner implied here. The opponents must therefore have some authority within the Christian community. Col 2:16 is the only use of κρίνω in Colossians, but Paul’s use in Romans and 1 Corinthians provides analogies for how the verb functions in Colossians as part of intra-communal judgement. While God is frequently the agent of judging or condemning (e.g. Rom 2:1–16; 3:6–7; 1 Cor 4:5), when Paul discusses internal disagreements over
food and idol-meat (similar to the problem in Colossians), he uses the verb \( \kappa \rho \iota \nu \omicron \) to describe the acts of judging to be avoided within the community (see Rom 14:3, 4, 5, 10, 22).\(^1\) While certainly not a technical term, \( \kappa \rho \iota \nu \omicron \) in Col 2:16 indicates that someone within the Christian community is doing the condemning. Similarly, no one could “disqualify” \( \kappa \alpha \tau \alpha \beta \rho \alpha \beta \epsilon \omicron \tau \omicron \omicron \) a fellow Christian unless they had some standing.\(^2\) A charismatic prophet, citing his visions of heaven and the angels, could command such authority.

The author of Colossians, responding to the threat against his own authority from the heavenly visions by John and his prophetic community, tries to turn his audience's attention away from the angels who inhabit the heavenly throne room and towards the Pauline theological traditions he represents. He values the established tradition handed down in the churches over prophetic visions that raise challenges to his authority on moral and theological matters.
IV.

The dispute between the two opposing groups goes deeper than the basic issues outlined in Col 2:16–23. It also includes an eschatological dimension. The source of their disagreements over eschatology, what Christ has done and has yet to do, is no doubt the heavenly revelations brandished by John as a source of authority and challenged by the author of Colossians. These visions include more than descriptions of angels worshiping in the heavenly throne room. They also describe “what is, and what is to take place after this” (Rev 1:19). The eschatological focus of these apocalyptic visions has become the source of ideological conflict between the apocalyptic prophets and the Pauline establishment in Colossae.

There are clues to this eschatological dispute in the interpretation of the Christ Hymn (1:15–20) in Col 1:21–23. The Christ Hymn is considered to be traditional material and should not be read too closely as a direct attack on the opponents. To do so would be futile mirror reading; the opponents did not necessarily hold the opposite of every statement in Col 1:15–18. Thus, we turn to the second main christological section, Col 2:9–15. This section is important rhetorically because it develops the author’s Christological and eschatological position in a polemical context, between the introduction and first assault against the opponents in Col 2:4–8 and the fuller attack in 2:16–23.
This section makes two main eschatological points. First, Col 2:10 picks up on the major Colossians theme of the πληρωμα (cf. Col 1:19), as the author assures his audience that they “have come to fullness” in Christ (ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ πληρωμα), a strongly realized statement without any eschatological reservation. The strongest eschatological statement occurs in 2:12 with the claim that in baptism, the Colossians “were also raised with him [i.e. Christ, ἐνῷ καὶ συνηγέρχθη] through faith in the power of God.” Col 2:12 is a striking parallel and reinterpretation of Rom 6:4, with the significant use of the aorist for συνηγέρχθη. This verse picks up a theme from the Christ Hymn. Col 1:12–14, which introduces the hymn, describe what Christ has done; all the verbs are aorist forms. The father "has enabled" (ἐπιλαμβάνοντος) the Colossians to share in the inheritance of the saints and has rescued them (ἐξῆλθεν) from the power of darkness and transferred (ἐκτέθη) them to the kingdom of his beloved son. The Colossians have (ἐπεστάλη) the forgiveness of sins as a present possession.

In contrast to Col 1:12–14 and 2:9–15, the visions of the Apocalypse could be described as a strong affirmation of “not yet” over any eschatological claims of “already.” To be sure, the horizon is short: Revelation describes “what must soon take place,” “for the time is near” (Rev 1:1–3; cf. 1:19). But the prominence of the eschatological reservation in the Apocalypse is strong. The messages to the seven churches each end with a future promise to “those who conquer” that they will receive a heavenly reward (δόσω in Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 28; 3:5, 12, 21). Christ has made the Christian community into a kingdom and a priesthood (Rev 1:6; 5:10), but they will rule upon the earth.
The inheritance of the New Jerusalem is an eschatological event that “those who conquer” may look forward to in the future (ὁ νικῶν κληρονομήσῃ ταῦτα, Rev 21:7). Even those who have been martyred in Revelation do not have the full benefits of those who have just been baptized in Colossians, since they are told to “rest a little longer” (Rev 6:11) while Col 2:12 promises the audience that they have already been raised with Christ. The realized eschatology of Col 2:12 is in stark contrast to the strong eschatological reservations expressed in Rev 6:11 (note B80DT T(pa< cf. Col 2:10 B, B80DT μυ<@α) or Rev 20:4–7, in which John envisions a future millennial rule of the martyred saints.

The second eschatological point in Col 2:9–15 involves Christ’s accomplishments. Col 2:10 describes Christ as “the head of every ruler and authority.” John does not disagree that Christ is the ruler of earthly powers (see Rev 1:5, ὁ ἀρχων τῶν βασιλεῶν τῆς γῆς), but the disagreement between the two texts could hardly be greater over the current status of “rulers and authorities.” Col 2:15 highlights the contrast. According to Colossians, God has "disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public examination of them, triumphing over them in it" (2:15). Again, all verb forms are aorist (ἵ διάκαθάνεις ἡμᾶς ἐν διψι στέφειν μέσον "Τ ήμᾶς ἐν διψί " and made a public examination of them, triumphing over them in it). The language is primarily militaristic; θριαμβεύω suggests the triumphal procession of a Roman emperor and ἀπεκδόθω, in the middle voice, means to disarm. The polemical statement of Colossian’s eschatology in Col 2:9–15 climaxes with militaristic image of God’s defeat, through Christ, of all
rulers and powers, earthly or heavenly. God's domination through Christ of the ð h oðhÎ is a key notion in Colossians (Col 1:13, 16; 2:10, 15). The author of Colossians might anticipate the glorious epiphany of Christ (with the believers, 3:4) but he does not anticipate any future battles between Christ and the powers of this world. According to 2:15, Christ has achieved this victory once and for all. Again, we see this view of Christ's reconciliation of the powers attached to the Christ Hymn. In Col 1:20, the author writes that, through Christ, God reconciled (ðποκαταλλαξαι) “all things, whether on earth or in heaven.” This is a universal statement of the reconciliation already achieved by God through Christ for the entire creation.

Whereas Col 2:15 portrays the final defeat of the authorities and powers, Revelation describes a situation in which God allows these powers and authorities considerable reign on earth for the near future at least. While John describes Christ as the ðhùí ð%âàòé ðúí ðøà ðå (Rev 1:5) and the ð ðø ðøðáù ð ðì ðì ðì (Rev 3:14), his visions portray considerable work left to be done with the ð h oðhÎ of the world, which in Revelation are the "kings of the earth" and the other allies of Satan, in particular the two beasts. The triumphal military imagery in Col 2:15 could well be a response to violent imagery of visions such as we find in Revelation. The Apocalypse abounds in visions of future struggles between the forces of God and the forces of Satan. Arguably the only vision of this struggle that expresses a past victory is Rev 12:7–17, in which Michael and the angels cast down the dragon Satan. Although ultimate victory is never in doubt in the Apocalypse, this apparent early victory over Satan is really
temporary. In Rev 12:18–13:18, John describes a vision of two beasts, one beast from the sea and one from the land, being given complete mastery over all social, political, religious, and economic activity on earth. Revelation 13 is typical of the text’s apocalyptic worldview. John envisions a series of climactic struggles before Satan is finally chained once and for all (Rev 20:1–4, 7–10). Most importantly, the earthly powers and authorities have yet to be finally defeated (Rev 16:12–21; 17:14; 18:21–24; 19:11–21). Where the author of Colossians describes God's victory through Christ as completed in the past, John describes these battles between the heavenly and demonic forces in the future (e.g., ὅ τι εἰμὶ θάνατος, 17:14; ἑωθὸν ὁ ὄλος, 20:7). The contrast between the realized eschatology of Col 2:11–15, which emphasizes what God has already done with the rulers and authorities, and Revelation, which dwells on visions of future conflict between the heavenly and demonic forces, could not be greater.

Reading Col 2:9–15 as a polemic against other Christian teachers suggests a further possibility for what the apocalyptic opponents are expounding. One is that Christ has not done these things; Christ has not yet fully disarmed the rulers and powers of the world. The Apocalypse presents this alternative theology and eschatological horizon in its visions. In a related variation, it is possible that the opponents are arguing that the achievements of the Christ have not yet been realized in the Christian community. Christians have not achieved freedom by Christ's deeds but are awaiting the return and final judgment before entering the heavenly city (see Rev 21:24–22:4; e.g., περιπατήσουσιν, 21:24; οἴσουσιν, 21:26; ὁμονταί, 22:4). These possibilities are by
no means mutually exclusive; rather, they build upon each other. If Christ's nature and actions are conceived in even slightly lower, more limited terms than the high view of Colossians, then it would follow that the eschatological promises of Christ have not been completely fulfilled. Rather than seeing the Christian community as already raised with Christ, John and his prophetic circle hold that significant work remains to be done within the Christian churches; this is the focus of the introductory messages in Revelation 2–3. Judgment and the final battle are coming soon, but they are in the future.

This paper has connected the mystical-apocalyptic school of interpretation for the Colossian opponents to a specific social-historical context. Millennial views have caused disruptions in established Christian churches throughout history, from the "new prophecy" of Montanus and his followers in Asia in the second century to the split between the Seventh Day Adventists and the Branch Davidians in the past century. It is highly plausible that the same sort of disturbance occurred in the Pauline churches of the Lycus valley, with the introduction of radical apocalyptic theology after the Roman war. Such a clash of theological perspectives and cultural worldviews would result in a powerful intra-church struggle. Divisions arise, both in antiquity and in modern times, over relatively small disagreements between religious groups which hold most of their beliefs in common. Power struggles gravitate toward these differences, however small
they might be. When we consider the social and ideological ramifications of the Christological and eschatological positions discussed here, we see the potential for a split between the more established hierarchy of the Pauline churches in Asia and the charismatic apocalyptic prophets from Palestine.

My hypothesis raises an important methodological question about the scholarly construal of opponents in the NT texts. Scholars have claimed that the Colossian opponents were Jewish, Gnostic, mystical, visionary, apocalyptic, philosophers, and of course syncretistic. The early Christians were all these. The advantage of my proposal is that one need not choose Jewish over pagan any more than one need say Paul was more “Greek” or “Jewish.” For the Colossian opponents, like all the early Christian groups of which we have evidence, were a diverse mix of these elements. The tendency to cast the opposition as a totally "other" group that can then be slanderously labelled "heretical" involves theological and canonical presuppositions that are at odds with the historical data and social-historical processes. While historical-critical scholars of the NT and early Christianity have learned to bracket the term "heresy" in the analysis of the earliest Christian groups, patterns of heresiological thinking remain in the scholarly discussion.


7. See H. Hegermann, Die Vorstellung vom Schöpfungsmittler im hellenistischen Judentum und Urchristentum (TU 82; Berlin: Akademi Verlag, 1961); and J. Lähnemann, Der Kolosserbrief: Komposition, Situation und Argumentation (SNT 3; Gütersloh: Gerd

9. So identified by Richard DeMaris, *The Colossian Controversy*, 18–40. He has labeled the five broad interpretive schools for the identification of the opponents Jewish Gnosticism; Gnostic Judaism; Ascetic, Apocalyptic, Mystical Judaism; Hellenistic Syncretism; and Hellenistic Philosophy.

1Thomas J. Sappington extends and refines Francis’ work on the apocalyptic–mystical construction of the opponents (*Revelation and Redemption at Colossae* [JSNTSup 53; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991]). DeMaris, *The Colossian Controversy*, argues for a "distinctive blend of popular Middle Platonic, Jewish, and Christian elements that cohere around the pursuit of wisdom" (17); while Troy W. Martin argues more pointedly that the opponents are in fact Cynic philosophers (*By Philosophy and Empty Deceit: Colossians as a Response to a Cynic Critique* [JSNTSup 118; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996]). Clinton E. Arnold argues for a syncretistic blend of Phrygian religious traditions and Jewish magical practices that lured the Colossians back from the “Pauline Gospel” preached by Epaphras (*The Colossian Syncretism: The Interface between Christianity and Folk Belief at Colossae* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996; orig. pub. *WUNT* 77; Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1995]).

11. Arnold argues against the philosophical interpretation and others on the basis of plausibility, since Colossae was not a major cultural center, but does not consider the most plausible situation of other Christian groups (*The Colossian Syncretism*, 4–5). James D. G. Dunn makes a compelling case for the Jewish context of the author’s
opponents, and argues against labeling the opponents as “heretics” or “errorists” (*The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* [NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996] 29–35, see esp. 24), but keeps the opponents in the realm of Jewish “otherness” over against Pauline (for Dunn, Paul and Timothy in Colossians) Christianity.


presented at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Boston MA, November, 1999) and his forthcoming New College (Edinburgh) dissertation.


eventually circulated as the Apocalypse, whether edited by disciples or not.

20. See David E. Aune, Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983) 274–88, and Aune, Revelation 1–5, lxxv–lxxvi on prophecy in Revelation. See Elisabeth Schüessler Fiorenza, The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 140–46; David E. Aune, "The Prophetic Circle of John of Patmos and the Exegesis of Revelation 22.16," JSNT 37 (1989) 103–116; and Aune, Revelation 1–5, liv, on John as the leader or "master prophet" of a group or guild of prophets. Yarbro Collins, Crisis and Catharsis, 46, opposes this hypothesis. There were Christian communities in Trales, Magnesia, Hierapolis, and of course Colossae, as well as the seven cities mentioned in the Apocalypse (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea). Since the choice of seven cities is clearly stylized to fit the literary structure of the Apocalypse, and since John, as an itinerant prophet, was known throughout Asia, it is likely that he had visited other Christian communities besides the seven in Revelation 2-3.

21. See Schüessler Fiorenza, Justice and Judgment, 85–113; critiqued by Raymond E. Brown (The Community of the Beloved Disciple, 6 n.5), but the continuance of Johannine motifs in Revelation does not obviate contact with Pauline traditions.

22. A fairly long tradition before the final text, 30 years or more, seems almost certain. Scholars are generally divided between a date in the 60s, under Nero, or the 90s, under Domitian (or possibly Trajan), but the main criterion has usually been the erroneous


24. R. H. Charles develops the parallels between Revelation and Colossians at some length and concludes that John had direct or indirect knowledge of Colossians itself (*A
25. The ἐκ is inserted in Rev 1:5, by assimilation with Col 1:18, in the majority tradition following Andreas of Caesarea. Paul, with the exception of the bracketed instance in 1 Thess 1:10, invariably uses ἐκ νεκρῶν (see Rom 4:24; 6:9, 13; 7:4; 8:11; 10:7, 9; 11:15; 1 Cor 15:12, 20; Gal 1:1; Phil 3:11) while Ephesians and Colossians vary (ἐκ νεκρῶν, Eph 1:20; Col 2:12; ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν, Eph 5:15; Col 1:18).


27. See Col 4:12; Philm 23; Lohse, Colossians and Philemon, 22–23; Schweizer, Colossians, 37; Dunn, Colossians, 63–65; Hubner, Kolosser, 49.

28. On Nympha’s role see Aune, Revelation 1–5, 249–50; Dunn, Colossians, 283–85.


30. Schüssler Fiorenza argues that the predicative statements in Rev 1:5–6 belong to early Christian baptismal tradition and that elements could have been taken from Christological traditions such as those reflected in Col 1:15–20 (Justice and Judgment,
70–73).


34. See Royalty, *Streets of Heaven*, 164–75.


36. See Rom 2:4–5; 9:23; 10:12; 11:12; 2 Cor 4:7; 6:10; 8:2. These three 2 Corinthians examples have a Stoic character; see Victor P. Furnish, *II Corinthians* (ABD 32A; New York: Doubleday, 1984) 347–348; John J. Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel: An Examination of the Catalogues of Hardships in the Corinthian Correspondence* (SBLDS

37. This use of wealth language appears in Paul only in Rom 11:33 and 1 Cor 1:5, where it is part of the ironic foreshadowing of 1 Cor 4:8. In this second use of πλουτεύω in 1 Corinthians, “becoming rich” connotes extensive spiritual enthusiasm, probably including speaking in tongues; Paul criticizes the Corinthian notion of “being rich” in 1 Corinthians 12–14. The other instances of wealth language in Paul concern financial support for his ministry, the churches, or the Jerusalem church (e.g. 1 Cor 16:2; 2 Cor 9:11; Phil 4:19).

38. γνωρίσαι (1:27); διδάσκοντες, σοφία (1:28); συνέσεως, ἐπίγνωσιν τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ θεοῦ (2:2); σοφίας καὶ γνώσεως (2:3); ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ διδάσκοντες (3:16).


40. See the criticisms of such approaches in Francis and Meeks, *Conflict at Colossae*, 216. Schweizer is a prime example: “the concept of the elements of the universe is in any case decisive” (*Colossians*, 128).

41. So too Schweizer, *Colossians*, 118.
42. The conceit of the “absent author” is part of the pseudepigraphical character of this letter.

43. The myth of the foundation by the συνδούλος Epaphras (1:7) strengthens the author’s emphasis on received tradition.

44. See Schweizer, Colossians, 123.

45. The verb παραλαμβάνω is a technical term for receiving tradition, corresponding to the Rabbinic ḥק and ṣם. See 1 Cor 11:23; 15:1; Gal 1:9, 12; Phil 4:9; 1 Thess 2:13; 4:1; m. Abot 1:1; Lohse, Colossians and Philemon, 92–93; Dunn, Colossians and Philemon, 138; and Hübner, Kolosser, 74–76.

46. So also Schweizer, Colossians, 122; Dunn labels Col 2:6–7 the “thematic statement” of the letter (Colossians and Philemon, 138–43).

47. Rhetorical theory describes the proofs in the argument (δοξολογία, Lat. probatio) of a speech as “inartistic” or external (ἀναφορή, Lat. inartificialis) and "artistic" or internal (ὁ αναφορή, Lat. artificialis) proofs. See Heinrich Lausberg, Handbuch zum literarischen Rhetorik: Ein Grundlegung der Literaturwissenschaft (2 vols.; Munich: Max Hueber, 1960) 1.190–93 [§348–54]; George A. Kennedy, New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984) 13–19; Arist. Rh. 1.2.2 [1355B]; 3.13.4 [1414B]; Quint. Inst. 5. preface, 1.1.

48. See Martin, Philosophy and Empty Deceit, 27–34. Francis and Meekss summarized the interpretational problems well in reference to ὁ ὈΣ ὝΣ ὈΣ ὍΣ ὍΣ ὍΣ ὍΣ ὍΣ in 2:8: "the phrase . . . may be the quotation of a slogan of the opponents, a description of their
thought and practice, or a *condemnatory*, perhaps *ironic*, attribution to them of something they deliberately avoid. Is Christ said to be the head of all rule and authority because the *opponents believe the opposite* (so that the positive assertions of the writer seemingly mirror the opponents)? Or is this simply the *writer's view* in any case?" (*Conflict at Colossae*, 216, their italics).

49. See Pokorný, *Colossians*, 112; Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 94. Dunn sees evidence here for the “powerful rhetoric” of Jewish apologists and rhetoricians in Colossae (*Colossians and Philemon*, 147), but this contradicts his earlier stance (32–33) that the Asian Jewish community was not “vigorously evangelistic.”

50. So also Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 148.


54. The use is possibly ironic or contemptuous; see BDB §302.
55. Lightfoot and Meyer also construe καὶ οὐ κατὰ Χριστοῦ in opposition to both κατὰ phrases, but Martin cites a number of scholars who see this only as a negation of κατὰ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου (Philosophy and Empty Deceit, 33 n.2). But Martin offers no justification for his “better” reading, which ignores the parallelism of the sentence. Schweizer calls the association “loose,” without further analysis (Colossians, 137).

56. The phrase recalls Mark 7:8; Mark 7:3–13 || Matt 15:2–9. See Schweizer, Colossians, 136; for Dunn, this association with Pharisaic traditions is further evidence of Jewish apologists as a source for the opposition (Colossians and Philemon, 148).

57. See Bandstra, The Law and the Elements of the World, 5–46, cited in Martin, By Philosophy and Empty Deceit, 32; see also Lohse, Colossians and Philemon. 96–98; Harris, Colossians and Philemon, 93; Dunn, Colossians and Philemon, 149–51.

58. Schweizer’s interpretation is distinguished in contrast by focusing exclusively on ὁestatus as the "basic" elements—earth, wind, air, and fire, and sometimes the "heavens." He admits, however, in "Slaves of the Elements" that ancient authors speak of the "power" of these elements and personify them, thus opening the way for broader understanding of the ὁestatus as spiritual powers.

59. Following the “bolder hypothesis” by Goulder with regard to possible alphabetical speculations by the Gnostic community that produced the Apocryphon of John ("Colossians and Barbelo," 615–616).

60. See Schweizer, "Slaves of the Elements," 468, differing slightly from the narrower


63. On this difficult verse, see Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 115 and Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 194–98 (who quotes Moule as calling it “hopelessly obscure”).

64. Cf. Rev 9:20–21, where πορνεῖα suggests that this particular condemned group probably ate meat offered to idols as well as worshiped actual physical idols. On the connections between idolatry and πορνεῖα, see Phyllis Bird, "'To Play the Harlot': An Inquiry into an Old Testament Metaphor," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (ed. P. L. Day; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989) 75–94; Exod 16:36; 23:2; 32:6; Judg 2:17; 8:33; 8:27; Deut 31:11; Isa 1:21; Jer 2:2; Ezek 16:36; 23:2; 1 Cor 10:6–8; and Wayne A. Meeks, "'And Rose up to Play': Midrash and Paraenesis in 1 Corinthians 10:1–22," *JSNT* 16 (1982) 64–78. For a comparison of vice-lists in the Apocalypse, see Royalty, *Streets of Heaven*, 223–25.

65. The problematic word ὀὐ̣ὶ ἀστερῶν (Col 2:8, 20), moreover, could refer to the stars and the 12 signs of the zodiac. See Ps.-Callisthenes 1.1.3 and 1.12.1; Diog. Laert. 6.102; and the *Paris Magical Papyrus* 4.1303; Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 97; Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 149. T. C. G. Thornton argues the astronomical
interpretation of στοιχεία in both Colossians and Galatians, maintaining that τὰ στοιχεία τοῦ κόσμου, for the author of Colossians, represents “pagan elements from which Christians are now free” ("Jewish New Moon Festivals, Galatians 4:3–11 and Colossians 2:16," JTS 40 [1989] 97–100). Troy Martin contends that the Colossian list is Jewish while the Galatian list could be Jewish or pagan (“Pagan and Judeo-Christian Time-Keeping Schemes in Gal 4.10 and Col 2.16,” NTS 42 [1996] 105–19).

66. Astrological imagery is noted by most commentators, but the function of this imagery in the text remains the subject of debate. Significant twentieth century astrological readings of Revelation include Franz Boll (Auf der Offenbarung Johannis: Hellenistische Studien zum Weltbild der Apokalypse [Berlin: Teubner, 1914])); Austin Farrer (The Revelation of St. John the Divine [Oxford University Press, 1964]); Bruce J. Malina, who suggests that John was an astral prophet who saw his visions in the sky (On the Genre and Message of Revelation: Star Visions and Sky Journeys [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995]); and Jacques M. Chevalier, who characterizes Revelation as a script setting eschatological views of time explicitly against pagan astral views (A Postmodern Revelation: Signs of Astrology and the Apocalypse [University of Toronto Press, 1997]).

67. See Aune for three different astronomical interpretations of this image, all of which have astrological implications (Revelation 1–5, 97–98).

68. See Charles, Revelation, 1:310–316; David Aune, Revelation 6–16 (WBC 52B; Dallas, TX: Word, 1998) 680. The origins of the imagery in Revelation 12 probably are in Babylonian and Greek myths; the twelve stars represent the twelve signs of the zodiac.
69. See Austin Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St John's Apocalypse* (Westminster, Dacre, 1949) 216–44. Charles claims that the gems are a *reversed* list of the signs of the zodiac and therefore are meant to be a repudiation of astronomical speculation (*Revelation*, 2:165–69), but see T. F. Glasson, "The Order of Jewels in Revelation XXI, 19–20: A Theory Eliminated," *JTS* 26 (1975) 95–100. The association with the twelve tribes of Israel and the gems in the High Priest’s pectoral is certainly primary; see David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22* (WBC 52C; Dallas, TX: Word, 1998) 1156.


71. According to Lightfoot, "The Colossians Heresy": “A mere glance at the epistle suffices to detect the presence of JUDAISM in the teaching which the Apostle combats. The observance of sabbaths and new moons is decisive in this respect” (*Conflict at Colossae*, 13). The phrase “festival, new moon, sabbath” appears in 1 Sam 20; LXX Hos 2:13; Ezek 45:17; 1 Chron 23:31; 2 Chron 2:3; 31:13. See Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 115; DeMaris, *Colossian Controversy*, 56–58. Both Arnold and Dunn make the “Jewishness” of the opponents a major point in their reconstructions. For Dunn, this is a “common sense” approach based on the evidence of significant Jewish communities in Asia (*Colossians and Philemon*, 24–33). Arnold’s association of Judaism with angel worship is another example of a scholar othering the opponents while keeping Pauline Christianity pure and undefiled; cf. Schweizer’s “Jewish Pythagoreanism.”


74. See 1 Sam 18:22; 2 Sam 15:26; 1 Kings 10:9; 1 Chron 28:4; Ps 111:1; 146:10; Test. Ash. 1:6; J. B. Lightfoot, *The Epistles of St. Paul: Colossians and Philemon* (London: MacMillan, 1875) 193, followed by most other commentators.

75. The third occurrence in 3:12 suggests that the author also valued such ascetic practices; see See DeMaris, *Colossian Controversy*, 59, 63–75.

76. See LXX Lev16:29, 31; 23:27, 29, 32; Ps 35:13; 69:10; Isa 58:3, 5; Jdt 4:9; *Pss. Sol.* 3:8; *Herm. Vis.* 3.10.6; *Herm Sim.* 5.3.7; 1 Tim 4:3; Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 178. While most commentators follow this sense, Lohse employs “readiness to serve” in
order to agree with his construction of ἐνεργήτει ἀθρόϊ: “for the worship of angels demands this” (Colossians and Philemon, 118).

77. Supported by Dibelius’ reading of ἐμβατευτο (Col 2:18) as a technical term for initiation into a mystery (“The Isis Initiation”). Taking the objective interpretation are Lohse, Schweizer, Arnold and Martin. Note Francis’ rejoinder (Conflict at Colossae, 181–82) to Lohse (Colossians and Philemon, 119 n. 36). Dunn surveys the evidence for the objective interpretation before choosing the subjective (Colossians and Philemon, 179–80).


79. See Isa 6:2–3; Ps 29:1–2; 148:1–2; I Enoch 14:18–23; 36:4, 39–40; 61:10–12; Dan 7:10; 1QSa 2:8–9; 1QH 3:21–22; 11:10–13; 1QSb 4:25–26; Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice (4Q400–405); Ascension of Isaiah 7–9; Apoc. Abr. 17–18; T. Job 48–50; Test. Lev. 3:3–8; Luke 2:14; Phil 2:10–11; also 2 Cor 12:2–4. Revelation is discussed below.

80. “worship directed to angels pushes the interpreter to the edge of and even beyond this tradition [of speculation on angels in first century Judaism]” (DeMaris, Colossian Controversy, 62).

81. See for instance Martha Himmelfarb, Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian

82. E.g., “as he had visions of them during the mystery rites” (Lohse, Colossians and Philemon, 114), taking Dibelius’ research on the Claros inscriptions as determinative. Schweizer dismisses the subjective reading of ôä‰êí àâëùí based on 2:23 because it refers to an activity of the Colossians rather than angels, but does not provide a discussion or translation of Ü ãâáëýùí (Colossians, 159 and “Slaves of the Elements,” 465 n. 39). The discussion of 2:23 does indeed focus upon the Colossians’ activity with respect to the halakah described in 2:16, 20–21 (noted above as the most salient aspect of the opposition). In a particularly flimsy reading of Rev 22:8ff, Schweizer writes that “God, Christ and the angels form a heavenly triad” (Colossians 159–60).

83. See Rev 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14. Roloff contends that the seven angels of the messages are a criticism of angel worship (Revelation, 38–40), but see Aune (Revelation 1–5, 131–2).

84. So also Francis, “Humility and Angelic Worship,” Conflict at Colossae, 179.


86. See esp. Rev 7:1–3; 8:7–9:13 and 11:15 (the seven angels and the seven trumpets); 10:1–11; 16:1–17 (the seven bowls); Revelation 18 passim (the destruction of the city of Babylon); and the interpreting angel in 17:1–18 and 21:9–22:6.

87. See above, n. ?.

1. See also 1 Cor 5:12, in which Paul distinguishes between the church judging those within the community and God judging those outside; and 1 Cor 6:1–6, which offers an apocalyptic vision of the church judging the world, including the angels; cf. Rev 20:4–5. DeMaris makes the comparison to Romans but does not note the intracommunal, Christian nature of the discussion (Colossian Controversy, 57–58).

2. On καταβαβευτω see Lohse, Colossians and Philemon, 117 and Dunn, Colossians and Philemon, 177. The verb suggests robbing a person of a prize unjustly; see BAGD, 409.

3. The traditional hymn was edited by the author, e.g. 1:18a, although a variety of theories exist on the structure and additions in the hymn. This issue is peripheral to the present study; see Lohse, Colossians and Philemon, 41–61; Dunn, Colossians and Philemon, 83–104; Hübner, Kolossians, 55–57; E. Käsemann, “A Primitive Christian Baptismal Liturgy,” Essays on New Testament Themes (SBT 41; London: SCM, 1964).

4. See Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 46 n. 100.


1. Cf. Col 1:13–14; 3:11; 4:11. Käsemann sees the hymn as a baptismal liturgy (, “Primitive Christian Baptismal Liturgy”). Dunn sees in 2:11–13 at least evidence of the Jewish character of earliest Christianity (περιτέμνω, περιτομή, ἀκροβυστία), in particular Paul (Rom 2:25–27; Gal 2:7–8); and at the most that circumcision was a factor in the Colossian dispute (*Colossians and Philemon*, 153–58). There is no evidence in Colossians or Revelation, however, that the apocalyptic prophets insisted on circumcision; see Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 101–102; cf. Pokorný, *Colossians*,
2. The shift in the eschatological horizon is an important piece of evidence for the deutero-Pauline authorship of Colossians and is evident in other parts of the letter. Col 2:13–14 expresses this realized eschatology consistently (note the aor. περιετμήθητε and συνεζωοίησεν; cf. ἦγέρθη and περιπατήσωμεν, Rom 6:4 and. συζησόμεν, Rom 6:8. It also raises exegetical problems (e.g. the construal of the dative τοῖς δόγμασιν) which are beyond the scope of this paper. See Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 103–106; Schweizer, *Colossians*, 143–6; Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 158–62; and Hübner, *Kolosser*, 82–83.


notes that the main metaphor is that of an imperial triumph but argues that the
principalities and powers in Colossians are not evil forces that have been conquered but
rather participate in the celebratory procession lead by Christ (“Colossians 2.15: Christ

6. Cf. Eph 1:21; 2:2; 3:10; 6:12; Rom 8:38; 1 Cor 15:24; Phil 2:9; 1 Pet 3:22; Heb 2:5; 2
Pet 2:10.

7. Col 3:4 is the only mention of the parousia in the letter. While Dunn suggests that
eschatological expectations here could be read in either way (*Colossians and Philemon*,
208), Colossians is much more restrained than Paul’s uncontested letters.

8. Wedderburn sees the letter narrowing down the truly universal scope of the hymn to
the reconciliation of human beings (“Theology of Colossians,” 40). The use of the verbs
ἀποκαταλάσσω and εἰρήνοποιεῖν in Col 1:20 suggest that an adversarial relationship
existed between Christ and the ἀρχαὶ καὶ ἔξουσίας, contra Yates.

9. The passive verb ἥπειρε in 13:5–7 is generally understood as an occurrence of the
"divine passive," implying that God has given the Beast this power; see Swete,
157.