

**THE ETHICAL MEANING OF THE CHRISTOLOGY OF COLOSSIANS:  
PERSPECTIVES FROM A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS**

by

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I declare that "The ethical meaning of the Christology of Colossians: Perspectives from a rhetorcal analysis" is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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## Summary

This dissertation is a detailed analysis of the Epistle to the Colossians. The author uses rhetorical critical methods and recognizes that the New Testament epistles are greatly influenced by oratory. Also, the author demonstrates how rhetorical techniques assist Paul to express his thought that the central idea of Christianity — the divine nature and saving work of Christ — has unavoidable ethical implications. In the first chapter of his letter Paul cites Christological hymn; he uses Christological theme during the whole epistle; the apostle concludes his admonition with the Household code, in which social roles of the member of *oikos* are interpreted in relation to Christ. According to Paul's teaching in Colossians, the power of Christ has universal scope and, consequently, all aspects of human life, including everyday, societal relationships, must be brought into submission to Christ.

## Key Terms

Colossians

Rhetoric

Letter

Composition

Structure

Hymn

Household code

*Oikos*

Christology

Ethics

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# List of Abbreviations

## Bible texts

LXX — Septuagint

NTG — Novum Testamentum Graece. 1996. Eds. Nestle, K. Aland. 27<sup>th</sup> ed. Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft

GNT — The Greek New Testament. 1979. Metzger. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. West Germany: United Bible societies.

## Bible books

NT — New Testament

Act — Acts

1 Cor — 1 Corinthians

2 Cor — 2 Corinthians

Eph — Ephesians

Col — Colossians

Phlm — Philemon

1 Tim — 1 Timothy

2 Tim — 2 Timothy

1 Pet — 1 Peter

2 Peter — 2 Peter

OT — Old Testament

Gen — Genesis

Ex — Exodus

Lev — Leviticus

Judg — Judges

## Classical Sources

Aristotle

*Polit.* □ *Politica*

*Rh.* □ *Rhetorica*

Cicero

*De Orat.* □ *De Oratore*

*Or.* □ *Orator*

Seneca

*Ep. Mor.* □ *Epistulae Morales*

## Translation of the New Testament

KJV — King James Version

NKJV — New King James Version

NIV — New International Version

KB — Russian translation by bishop Kassian (Bezobrazov)

## Other Literature

ABD — The Anchor Bible Dictionary. Ed by Freedman DN. New York: Doubleday.

DPL — Dictionary of Paul and his Letters. Ed by Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin; associate Ed by Daniel GR. England, Leicester: InterVarsity Press.

JBL — Journal of Biblical Literature

JEST — Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society

JSRC — Journal for the Study of Rhetorical Criticism of the New Testament

## Introduction

According to sociological sociologists, two thirds of the Russian population claim to be “religious”, and the majority claim to be Christians.<sup>1</sup> At the same time the general living standard in Russia indicates that most people have no sense of their personal civic duty: crime rate is one of the highest in the world, while the level of income is one of the lowest. The discrepancy between the faith people profess and the everyday life they lead gives witness to the fact that the majority of Russians have no idea how much the condition of their society depends on the ethics of their own personal interactions, and how closely their ethics are connected to the depth of their religious conviction. In other words, faith in Christ has very little visible influence on the behavior of a person outside of church buildings — his or her everyday life is not dependent on his or her religious life.

In this climate of “religious autism” (Veniamin 1999:131), we believe that it is very important to turn to the source of the Christian faith and trace how the NT elucidates the relationship between the teachings about Christ and the teachings about the significance of social and physical aspects of human life. Our goal is: to show the interrelationship of Christology and ethics not by the examples of the fragments of the text, but on the base of the whole book.

We think that the optimal way to reach this objective is to analyze the rhetorical value of the composition of the whole epistle in light of the principles of classical rhetoric, current at the time of the writing of the epistle. In this way we will be engaging in a form of rhetorical criticism, which:

transcends the atomism and antiquarianism of many types of criticism, combines close reading with a holistic perspective, and follows the dynamics of the text through to encounter, transformation and renewed practice (McDonald 1990:600).

Rhetorical analysis allows us to take in the document as a single whole and observe the author’s methods of argumentation. Our position is that the text’s composition mirrors the order of author’s argumentation in a great extent. So, the analysis of the composition lets us understand the course of the author’s reasoning. This will prove to be crucial for our study, because we not only want to appreciate the ethical exhortations in the text of Colossians, but also to understand how the apostle motivates his readers and how he established the connection between orthodoxy and orthopraxy in their lives, their community, and their society.

We did not choose the epistle to Colossians for our analysis arbitrarily. First of all, we were attracted by its subject matter, which corresponds to the goal of this investigation. Christology and

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<sup>1</sup> See Shtipkov 1998:3.



ethics are the two main themes of the epistle. The importance of these themes for the author of Colossians is confirmed by the use of literary forms: the Christological hymn (1:15-20) and the Household code (3:17-4:1). Though form analysis is not the theme of this research, we should notice that the question of the use of liturgical literary forms in the text of the NT epistles and the meaning of this use for interpretation is worthy of investigation.

In addition, the epistle to Colossians has certain attributes, which also influenced our choice. One of them is its authorship. Colossians belongs to the group of “questionable” epistles<sup>2</sup>, which usually are not very popular for researchers. Indeed, such Pauline epistles as Romans, Galatians, 1 Corinthians, Philippians, and Philemon (i.e. the epistles whose authorship is unquestioned) have already been rhetorically analyzed<sup>3</sup>. Thus, the analysis of Colossians let us touch a topic, which has never been developed.

But we should show our own position on the question of Colossians’ authorship. Hughes writes that the investigator of Pastoral or Imprisonment letters of Paul:

must either accept and attempt to defend Pauline authorship for all or part of these letters, or ...follow the harder and thus less traveled road ...and then (hopefully) make an experimental reconstruction of the relationship of the pseudonymous author to various Pauline traditions (Hughes 2001).

We think, that the question of Colossians’ authorship is worthy of the separate investigation, so we have to leave it out of this research. We also will not try to determine the possible later interpolations and editor’s correcting, thus we assume that the author of the epistle could use the existed literary form. On the other hand, we will state at the outset that we accept both the Pauline authorship and the integrity of the text itself, as they have been preserved by Church tradition. We can discuss the punctuation and some variant readings, but the quest of the “canon within the canon” is not an aim of this research. In other words, we acknowledge that the author of the epistle to Colossians was Paul, and our source of its text is the 27<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Novum Testamentum Graece*, by Nestle-Aland.

Another aspect of Colossians — its size — makes this epistle very attractive for rhetorical analysis. Indeed, Colossians is not too big to take in as a single whole. At the same time its volume is sufficient to adequately develop the thesis of the author.<sup>4</sup> So, the size of Colossians allows us to reach the goal of our research, namely to watch the author’s development of thought and his argumentation throughout the whole epistle.

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<sup>2</sup> See O’Brain 1993b:150-151

<sup>3</sup> See Hester 1993.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Philemon, which is usually used as an example of the structure of Paul’s epistles (see Duling & Perrin 1994:209, Du Toit 1996:7-9)



Another factor in our choice of this epistle was the unique purpose of Colossians amongst the communities of Early Church. Although this epistle has been addressed to a specific community, this is the only NT epistle, which makes direct mention of the fact that it was intended by its author to be an encyclical letter, sent to a number of churches (Col 4:16). The explicit acknowledgement of the fact that an epistle, addressed to one local community, has meaning for another is tantamount to claiming that the apostle's exhortations contained in the epistle are universal, not intrinsically tied to the specific rhetorical situation of any one community. The fact that the author of Colossians himself understands the public character of his epistle is vital importance for our choice of methodology.

Maintaining contact was not the only goal of the apostles' epistles. The apostles wanted to influence the attitudes and behaviors of their readers by means of their epistles. Therefore, we can call these epistles "a hybrid product of epistolary and rhetorical theory" (Hester 2001). Paul's command to read his epistles to another community says that the apostle himself understood that his letter differed from usual letters. So, if other NT epistles contain veiled references to their particular value, which has been identified by Church and has led to the creation of the canon, then Colossians demonstrates direct evidence of this. We will assume, then, that the epistle to Colossians is a piece of rhetorical literature, influenced by the known principles of rhetoric, such that the epistle may appropriately be analyzed as a rhetorical work.

In this investigation we refer to the Greco-Roman epistolary and rhetorical traditions, and do not say anything about the Hebrew influence on the NT epistles' texts. The reason for this is the lack of sufficient sources to identify any independent Hebrew traditions, to which Hebrew and Aramaic letters may belong (Padree 1978:324). Hellenistic Hebrew letters have obvious Greek influence as well as "early Christian epistles are bound much more to Hellenistic, than to Eastern epistolary conventionalities" (Aune 2000:178).

The influence of Hellenistic/Greco-Roman rhetoric on the NT epistles is mainly evidenced by their composition: the author worked to state his ideas in such a way, which would make them as clear and convincing as possible. Consequently, the analysis of the whole epistle, and not only its peculiar fragments, allows us to identify the author's main ideas and the way, in which he understood the cause-and-effect relationship between his conceptions.

So then, the thesis of this research is: The analysis of composition of the epistle to Colossians demonstrates that the central idea of Christianity — the divine nature and saving work of Christ — has unavoidable ethical implications. The power of Christ has universal scope and consequently, all aspects of human life including everyday, societal relationships must be brought into submission to Christ.

In the First chapter of this research we will clarify the types of rhetorical methods that were employed by NT epistles, given their peculiar genre and particular goals. An outline of the overall composition of the epistles will assist us in determining and defining the significance of Colossians' composition.

The Second chapter will be devoted to the identification of the composition of the epistle to Colossians. We will also notice the particular rhetorical methods, which Paul used to focus the attention of his readers on the main themes of his epistle, namely Christology and ethics.

In the Third chapter we will trace, how Paul formed his argumentation on the suggested purpose of the epistle. We will see, how he turned the teaching about Christ into a methodological basis for ethical exhortation.

The results of the research will be summarized in its Conclusion.

## Chapter One

### Rhetoric of the New Testament Epistles

#### **1.1 New Testament epistles: goals and forms**

As the teaching about the risen Messiah spread across Jerusalem, and later throughout Judea, there grew a need to ensure the identity of faith. Apostles, who were mainly involved in spreading the Christian message, could not possibly take care of numerous new churches all over the Roman Empire. So, letters were written and to protect the Church from false teaching, to publish decrees of the Jerusalem Apostles (i.e., of the senior apostles, such as found in Acts 15:22-29) and, also, so as to expose larger numbers of people to the apostles' guidance.

The roots of the Early Christian epistolography are found in an earlier epistolary tradition that was well in existence by the middle of the first century CE. Nevertheless, epistles in the NT have some characteristic features, which were in the first place predetermined by the authors' objectives.

##### **1.1.1 Epistle: from oral message to philosophic letter**

The word ἐπιστολή refers to a message, itself, whether oral or written (Sobolevsky 1958:1/637). A messenger could merely tell the message or bring a letter written on a slate, or papyrus. The latter could have been accompanied also with a spoken comment or some additional information (Aune 1987:157). So, a letter is a means of communication for people who live far from each other, or who live in different époques (Schnelle 1998:33). Therefore, a letter is closely connected to spoken language (Aune 1987:195).

Surviving guides on letter writing by Pseudo Demetrius (circa IV BCE) and by Pseudo Libanius (V CE) mention 21 and 41 types of letters, respectively. The types of letters (friendly, commendatory, blaming, advisory, apologetic, ironic, thankful and so on) are mainly defined by the circumstances in which they are written (White 1986:203). So, clearly, the objective of a particular letter predetermines how the message could be classified. Thus, to be able to interpret the letter adequately we need to consider the rhetorical situation that the letter was indented to resolve.

Most ancient letters in survival today are real letters (the actual correspondence between relatives, friends or employers and employees) and, thus, only contain information about everyday



life.<sup>5</sup> Still, in later times, since the third century BCE in Greece and since the first century CE in Rome, “a letter transgresses the bounds of real correspondence and gains the position of philosophic sermon and scientific study” (Miller 1967:6). Thus, in the author-message-receiver chain the message becomes the most important element. This process was clear in the first through the second centuries CE when the letters of famous philosophers and orators were collected and published. For instance, the letters of Cicero were real, private letters and were only published after his death, whereas Seneca and Pliny the Older intended their letters to be published. Pliny the Younger, as Kuznetsova mentions, was a real expert in artificial epistolography (Kuznetsova 1967a: 101).

### 1.1.2 Public character of Paul’s epistles

How can we classify the New Testament epistles, the epistles of Paul in particular? Even those epistles, which have been addressed to people unknown to Paul (Rom, Col), are very private, containing plenty of greetings and forms of address. All of Paul’s epistles are addressed to particular groups of people, so, technically, they cannot be classified as encyclical.

At the same time, all of the epistles are public: none are addressed to a particular person. Even the Epistle to Philemon, though fairly private, is addressed to the community (Philemon 1:2)<sup>6</sup> (see Schnelle 1998:37). The fact that, either, the collection or separate epistles of Paul<sup>7</sup> started to circulate very early, as well as the fact that the epistolary inheritance of the apostle was carefully preserved and codified, proves that the people who lived then considered the epistles valuable, regardless of time and situation.

The epistolary style of the apostle to the Gentiles is well described by Du Toit: “personal in nature, yet not private” (Du Toit 1996:3). In one opinion, the NT epistles in general and those of Paul in particular can be considered the same type as the letters by Pliny the younger, composed at the same time: “real, but composed in order to be published” (Kuznetsova 1967b:120).

### 1.1.3 Epistolary sermons

The NT epistles were aimed not only to keep in touch but also to teach. The letters preserved by the Church as a part of the New Testament used to be read aloud during congregational meetings (Col 4:16, 1 Thes 5:27, Rev 1:3, 22:18). So, the Early Church considered the NT epistles to be not only open letters addressed to the public, but written sermons, i.e. specific means to communicate

<sup>5</sup> See White 1986:189; Kovelman 1988:20, 62.

<sup>6</sup> There are 2PI forms of address — the pronoun ἡμεῖς or Voc.Pl. (e.g., ᾧ ἀνόηται Γαλάται) — in all Paul’s epistles (excluding Pastoral Epistles; in Phil — only in Introduction and Conclusion).

<sup>7</sup> It is believed that epistles of Paul make up “the earliest canon of New Testament” (Gathry 1996:762, cf. Aune 2000:181, Doty 1993:454). The fact that Paul’s epistles had early circulation is noted in New Testament: 2 Thess 2:2, Col 4:16. 2 Peter 3:15 imply that “at least 3 epistles of Paul have been in circulation and quite possibly were joined together” (Metzger 1987:253).



spoken words. The epistle of the apostle was turning into “a substitute of [apostle’s] *oral* presence” (Russell 1982:296, italic edit — *M.K.*).

Hence, we can say that letters were a kind of talk-at-a-distance, and once published, they became a public talk fixed in writing. NT epistles underwent another kind of transformation. Being a written matter they turned into speech again. So, readers of the epistle would be a listening audience at the same time. Thus, NT epistles are sermons not only because they were read aloud. The aim of the apostle’s epistles was to guide, to console and many times to preach to Christians, inducing them to change their way of thinking. Due to this fact, we can compare New Testament epistles with letters of Seneca (see Schnelle 1988:34) — philosophic and moral lectures, widely spread in the first century CE. Letters on ethical issues did not only require a listing of the facts<sup>8</sup> but, also, the use of rhetoric techniques (Osherov 1986:16), because, in that case, the reader was supposed to react in some way or another and make a decision (a decision to alter their lifestyle even). As Miller points out, ancient ethic letters “were influenced by rhetoric and functionally performed as samples of oratory” (Miller 1967:6).

Thus, that even though New Testament epistles are private letters by nature, they were intended to be read out to a large audience. This is why we insist that the New Testament epistles be analyzed as samples of rhetoric art as well.

## **1.2 Peculiarities of New Testament rhetoric**

### **1.2.1 Language means available to the New Testament authors**

The authors of the NT were not native speakers of Greek. Therefore, they, including Paul, could not use fluently the traditional techniques of Greek or Roman orators.<sup>9</sup> As it has been known “the language of the NT authors is nearer to the simple popular language” (Blass & Debrunner 1961:2, #3). This fact, as well as the objective of early Christian epistles to meet practical needs of a congregation, explains why the NT is not linguistically challenging.

Initially, the teaching about Christ was spread in Palestine and then among the Jews of the Diaspora. Although most Jews (primarily Jews of the Diaspora) were fluent in Greek, the language of LXX, which included Jewish stylistic structures, was predominant for them. LXX was also the Holy Book for the Gentiles who converted to Judaism. Therefore, the language of the NT is a combination of the language used for translation of the OT and *koine* Greek, as interpreted by the

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<sup>8</sup> This kind of listing was enough for philosophical treatises, which were connect to epistolary genre only relatively.

<sup>9</sup> Cicero writes that the perfect possession of language, which “is taken in childhood” during “grammar teaching” and “becomes perfect by reading the orators and poets” is “the elementary requirement for an orator” (*De Or.*, 10 (38-39)).

Jews of the Diaspora. This combination created a NT language that is characterized by semitisms, “septuagintisms” and speech constructions of the Greek-speaking Jews (Blass & Debrunner 1961:3, #4), which is revealed through figures of speech, as well as through methods of argumentation and thought presentation in general.

However, the relative simplicity of the NT texts is not explained solely by the fact that its authors did not have a perfect command of Greek. It is important to consider that the first Christian preachers consciously avoided manipulating their audience. For instance, Paul repeatedly emphasized the naiveté of his speeches and messages. He spoke of his desire to make the sermon as simple as possible, so that, the faith of his listeners “should not be in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God,” and “not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Cor 2:4-5, NKJV).

If none of the traditional authors of the NT epistles was a professional rhetorician and if some of the authors consciously avoided verbal sophistication, is it possible to speak of such a phenomenon as the NT rhetoric? We believe, it is.

Fluency in a language (in this case — Greek) means acceptance of the traditional way of thinking and, consequently, thought presentation. The classical grammatical forms and constructions, quotations from the contemporary literature, technical rhetoric terms (see Anderson 1999:280-282) found in the NT speak to the fact that some of the authors “must have some kind of grammatical and rhetorical education” (Blass & Debrunner 1961:2, #3). Moreover, F. Young noted: “there are fundamental ‘laws of rhetoric,’ which are transcultural” (Young 1999:599). Consequently or not, every human being builds one’s speech in accordance to rhetorical situation, which is determined by language means of the author and receiver and, also, by the content of the message and the circumstances of its delivery.

We can conclude that the vocabulary and style of the NT epistles was determined by the Jewish origin of its authors and by their conscious striving to avoid the unnecessary techniques of rhetoric. Nevertheless, we should not underestimate the influence of the Greek language and culture. Sharing about the Jewish Messiah with a Hellenic audience, the NT authors, who were also Hellenized to some extent, had to use the language that was familiar to their listeners.

### **1.2.2 Literary forms found in the New Testament epistles**

The NT epistles were created in the church and for the church. Most of them were designed to be read out-loud, i.e. for liturgical use. These two factors explain the occurrence of specific literary forms that stand out by their specific, poetic structure (see Bichsel 1992:350, Duling & Perrin 1994:210-213). By their contents, these literary forms can be divided into liturgies (prayers, blessings, short doxologies, hymns, statements of faith and liturgical sequences) and



admonishments (lists of vices and virtues, household codes, tradition of the two ways) (see Aune 2000:190-194). For the most part, the origin of these literary forms is unclear.

Why would the author of this or that epistle abruptly change his style of writing? For what purpose would he suddenly start quoting his own or other well-known Christian hymns, blessings, doxologies or codes?

Poetry, as well as music, by its nature, is supposed to evoke special feelings and emotions in people towards this or that event or phenomenon. Vivid images and a specific style typical of poetry (rhythm, meter, specific structure and rhyme) not only facilitate memorization, but, also, produce a certain emotional effect on the listeners, convincing them that the message is important, true and accurate. This is what Gasparov says about the nature and functions of poetry:

At the beginning of a society's formation and use of communication, there started to appear certain texts of increased significance, i.e. those that more than others encouraged the unification of the society. Because of their increased value, they were to be repeated often and precisely. This called for a form that was convenient for memorization. It's easier to remember what can be repeated ... with specially selected [words and phrases]. Discarded are the words that are not included in the standard vocabulary, or that differ from colloquial phrases and do not fit into the meter, images and motifs, which are not traditional in this application... (Gasparov 2000b:374).

Therefore, the use of the literary forms demonstrates, again, that the NT epistles were closely connected with the oral tradition of early Christianity. These forms were used to reinforce arguments made by the NT authors. The vivid images and specific poetic style, characterized by the rhythm, meter, specific structure and rhyme, serve to both facilitate memorization and produce a certain emotional impact on the listeners, convincing them that the message is important, true and accurate. We can suppose that the analysis of the literary forms and their functions in the text of the epistle will help to identify the author's line of reasoning and argumentation.

### ***1.3 General composition of the New Testament epistles***

In our opinion, before beginning a study of the structure of a text, it is necessary to establish the standards for text division and then follow those standards. For example, the "Opening" of the entire letter and the "Body-opening" represent different levels of the structure. For this reason we think that they cannot be listed in the same row as it was suggested, for instance, by Du Toit (1996:8). Due to the same reason, we do not think that the suggested linear enumeration of the parts of the epistle, by Roetzel, (according to Duling & Perrin 1992:210-11) is quite correct because these parts refer to different sections. Into what basic parts can one divide the NT epistle?

The letters used for communication. The message coded and written in a specific manner assumes the rules of the particular manner of coding and fixation. That is why the first step in

identifying the structure of the epistle is to separate the subject matter of the discussion and elements reflecting specific conditions and circumstances. Thus, we divided the epistle into the basic parts, which are the epistolary opening, the body of the epistle and the epistolary closing. Furthermore, a complex division of the epistle is done within the framework of this basic three-part structure.

In non-real letters, the epistolary opening and closing (i.e. the addressing of and farewell to the imagined recipients of the letter) can be left out without any harm to the contents of the letter. In actual letters, these fragments are an integral part of the message. And, although in form, they may comply with a certain standard, more spontaneous addresses to the reader found in the Body of the message, reveal the actual relationship between the author and the addressee. It is this essential belonging of formal epistolary opening and closing to the body of the letter, along with close interconnection of the form and contents, that serve as one of the primary indicators of the letter's authenticity.

The epistolary opening of the NT and early Christian letters in general reflects the Jewish origin and Greek adaptation of the new faith in εἰρήνη the typical Jewish greeting, to which was added to the Greek χάρις, a Christian adaptation of the Greek greeting χαίρειν. Besides the standard formula denoting the author, addressee and a brief greeting, most epistles in the NT contain extensive introductory prayers and/or thanksgivings. The volume of the opening prayers can be best explained by the fact that the reason for writing the letters was not issues of everyday life, but religious fellowship. Thus, the uniqueness of the NT epistles is evident from the very first lines.

A letter is also a reflection of oral speech and, consequently, it contains some distinctive features of the oral speech. The middle and, by definition, the largest part of the epistle — the body — is the most complex part as well (Aune 1987:181). Apostolic letters were intended to be read out loud to the congregation, so the body of such a letter should be treated as a public speech.

The public speech composition was based on a three-part structure: introduction, main part, and conclusion. This structure can expand by the further division of the main part into smaller parts (Gasparov 2000:437-438). Aristotle and Cicero agree that the main part should consist of two elements: “presentation ... and method of persuasion ... [or] goal and solution” (*Rh.*, 1414a/35, see also *De Or.*, 7b/307). We suggest to view the body of the epistle as consisting of three parts, but we admit that each of these parts, especially the largest one — the main part — can have its own composition.

The beginning and the end of a speech (or of the body of an epistle) — introduction and conclusion — do not serve to merely mark its borders. The main function of the introduction and conclusion is to state the key points of reasoning, premises and inference: “introduction to a speech



should .... be taken from the very essence of the issue” (*Or.*, II 78/318), and conclusion is for “summing up” (*Rh.*, 1419b/30). When the speaker presents introduction and conclusion, the attention of his listeners reaches its climax and therefore, it is very important to state the key points here. According to Cicero, “the strongest argument should be placed first ...[and] potent arguments should be saved for the conclusion” (*Or.*, II, 77/314).

However, should we expect the NT epistles to be fully compliant with standards of the Roman-Greek rhetoric? Undoubtedly, another significant factor influencing the authors of early Christian epistles. Naturally, the degree of this influence, as well as the level of Roman-Greek influence in each individual situation, was conditioned by the unique combination of circumstances in which this or that epistle was created. We should also remember that in real letters epistolary opening and closing inseparably linked with the body of the epistle. This peculiarity makes the clarification of the structure of the whole letter more difficult. Besides, as we know, the NT authors were not professional rhetoricians or writers and were unlikely to closely observe the rhetorical rules.

Any outline only indicates the general flow of author’s thoughts. We repeat, that in each individual epistle the uniqueness of the epistolary style is conditioned by its own rhetorical situation. Thus, we can assume that NT epistles were based on the following structure: the epistolary opening, the body of the message (which includes the introduction, the main part (the presentation and development of the thesis), and the conclusion) and the epistolary closing. This structure will help us to understand the consecution of apostle’s thoughts.

#### **1.4. Conclusion**

In this chapter we discussed general issues of the NT rhetoric. Our task was to identify the goals of the authors of the epistles and the rhetoric methods available to the authors to attain their goals.

We have identified that even at the earliest stage of its formation the Church encountered the need to establish communication between churches to provide remote congregations with apostolic instructions. Epistles were used to meet this need. The style and structure of writings were determined by the circumstances under which they were created. The NT epistles were written to the Hellenic audience and were heavily influenced by the Greek-Roman epistolary tradition. The appearance of apostolic epistles is linked to real events but at the time, the authors following the call of the Church, originally wrote their messages to be significant not depending on the historical circumstances of their creation. That is why we attribute NT epistles to the epistolary type of real letters meant for publication. Another distinctive feature of the NT epistles is their close connection

to the sermon: they were intended not to merely convey some information to the readers but to change their life views and life styles. Besides, the epistles did not just put the author's thoughts on paper but they were meant to be read out loud. These facts allowed us to correlate apostolic messages to public speeches and provided foundation for the rhetoric analysis of the epistles.

Having studied the language means available to the authors and readers of the NT, we noted that the Jewish language and the language of LXX influenced the style of the NT. It leads us to the conclusion that the NT epistles contain rhetoric devices, one of which is the use of literary forms that go back to the early Christian liturgical and admonishing traditions. Distinctive features of the genre determine the composition. The NT epistles are real letters and because of it, the epistolary opening and closing are integral parts of the body of the epistle. The composition of the body demonstrates that the apostolic messages comply with the rules for public speeches — introduction and conclusion are rhetorically important, the main part includes presentation and development of the epistle' thesis.

If the composition is determined by the aims and goals of the epistle, we will be able to track down this connection backwards. The analysis is supposed to throw light unto the original intentions of the author. We will see how the system of reasoning works, the line of argumentation of the apostle and, consequently, we will be able to identify the purpose of the author and the means to fulfil it.

In the next chapter we shall utilize our conclusions to analyze the composition of the epistle to the Colossians.

## Chapter Two

# Composition of the Epistle to the Colossians: Rhetorical Methods

As appears from its name, this chapter is aimed at identifying the composition of Colossians and the rhetorical methods used in the book. We would like to start our work by studying certain elements of its structure, specifically the poetic fragments of the text. Further on, we will focus on the composition of this epistle as a whole. The analysis of the text organization will enable us to see which fragments of the text the author considered most important.

### ***2.1 Literary forms used in the epistle to Colossians: hymn and household code***

In the previous part of our work we have seen that there are some kind of the literary forms, which go back to the oral tradition and show the importance of the discussed theme.<sup>10</sup> There are two such forms in Colossians: hymn and household code.

#### **2.1.1 The Hymn: poetic expression of faith**

##### ***2.1.1.1 General information***

The text of the NT (epistles of Paul, in particular) speaks to the fact that the early church had songs of praise and exhortation (Eph 5:19, Col 3:16). Researchers have established a number of the attributes, which determine whether or not a passage is a part of an early Christian hymn (for more details, see Martin 1993:420-421). However, if the identification of a poetic fragment in a text is a relatively simple task, the identification of its origin and initial function is quite challenging.

The origin of the hymn in Colossians (1:12-20), as well as other hymns found in the NT, is still not clear (and may never be). The scope of this work does not allow us to closely study the authorship of the Hymn. This issue was extensively addressed by Helyer in his article “Colossians 1:15-20: Pre-Pauline or Pauline” (1983). He concluded that the author of the hymns was Paul. We think that the authorship of the hymns is still questionable. It is known that Paul, when quoting Greek poets (Act 17: 28, 1 Cor 15:32, 33, Titus 1:12), did not as a rule refer to their original source.

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<sup>10</sup> See section 1.2.2.



Had not these sources survived until the present day, we would have concluded that the author of these passages was Paul as well.

However, our assumptions regarding the authorship of the Hymn are just that, and they “can neither be proved nor disproved” (Heyler 1983:172).<sup>11</sup> But no matter whether Paul used a ready-made hymn or wrote it himself, we can be sure that he used it consciously in his epistle.

### ***2.1.1.2 The structure of the fragment 1:12-20***

#### **i. Invitation to the Hymn (Col 1:12-14) or the Little Hymn**

On the scheme (see, Appendix 1), the Hymn is forestalled by the opening fragment 1:12-14, which has been referred to as the Little Hymn. However, separation of verse 1:12 from the previous verses (1:10-11) can raise doubts, because formally, 1:12 is a part of an expanded complex sentence starting in 1:9. Nevertheless, we have separated verses 1:12-14 into a structure unit, which is closely related to the Hymn 1:15-20. Why?

In Appendix 5, it is graphically shown how we understand the syntax of the entire passage 1:12-20. Verses 10-11 contain a group of participles (participial constructions) that serve as adverbial modifiers of manner to the main clause (infinitive) in verse 10a. The phrase εὐχαριστοῦντες τῷ πατρὶ (1:12a) is “loosely joined” (Lohse 1971:24) to this group of participles. This allows researchers to conclude that the last participle is the “introduction to the invitation of the hymn” (ibid). Dunn insists that the participle εὐχαριστοῦντες is an “imperative participle,” and it should be treated separately from the first three participles (Dunn 1996:68). Papyrus P<sup>46</sup> adds two words (καὶ and ἄμα) and suggests the following reading of the beginning of verse 12: καὶ εὐχαριστοῦντες ἄμα. In this case, ἄμα appears to be an isolated adverbial modifier of time (“meanwhile as”) (Blass & Debrunner 1961:219 #425 (2)). Markus Bart also treats this participle separately and translates εὐχαριστοῦντες τῷ πατρὶ as “He thanks the Father” (Barth & Blanke 1994:183). Also, it is unclear, whether the case with the preposition μετὰ χαρᾶς (1:11) serves as an adverbial modifier of verse 11 and modifies the three participles of verses 10-11 (καρποφοροῦντες, αὐξανόμενοι, δυναμούμενοι) as it is defined in the text GNT, or this modifier relates to the participle εὐχαριστοῦντες, thus opening a new (subordinate) clause (as in NTG text).

On the other hand, researchers such as Abbott and Litt (1991:205), Harris (1999:28-29) and Wall (1993:54) view the group of the four participles as a whole. In this case, all the four participles serve as similar parts of the sentence — adverbial modifiers of manner. Moreover, Wall identifies an inclusio formed by εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ and εὐχαριστοῦντες τῷ πατρὶ in verses 3 and 12 respectively. According to Wall, the inclusio marks the boundaries of the thanksgiving prayer of

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<sup>11</sup> Heyler refers this phrase only to the opportunity of Asia Minor origin of the Colossians hymn.



Paul (*ibid.*). We acknowledge the validity of this view, but we still think that the composition of the passage appears more consistent if we accept Lohse and Dunn's version.

Lohse points out that "Paul never closes the intercession in his letters with thanksgiving or with the summons to it" (Lohse 1971:33) and because of that according to the quoted author, μετὰ χαρᾶς εὐχαριστοῦντες should be viewed as the beginning of a new part, namely a hymn (*ibid.*). Moreover, LXX uses εὐχαριστεῖν to reflect the Jewish verb פָּדַח in the hiphil form to serve "to introduce the song of thanks and praises" (*ibid.* 34).

Therefore, we think it is appropriate to place the Hymn alongside its Invitation (see Appendix 1). We also named the passage 1:12-14 the "Little Hymn" because some researchers considered this passage to be a quotation of an ancient Christian song. For example, Käsemann viewed the alternation ὑμεῖς - ἡμεῖς in verses 12 and 13 as evidence that the entire piece in verses 12-20 was a Baptism liturgy (the contents of verses 1:13 supports it as well).<sup>12</sup> Dunn disagrees with Käsemann in regards to the topic of the presumed hymn and supports his viewpoint, claiming that he thinks that at the time of writing the epistle Baptism was not yet singled out as a specific ritual but was a "more spontaneous affair" (1996:68). We believe that verses 1:12-14 can still be a short hymn or a piece of a hymn because they contain the typical ὅς, chiasm (1:12-13) and synthetic parallelism (1:14) (see Appendix 1). It is hard to say for what purpose this hymn was written. Lohse supposes that the author of the epistle quotes this "piece of tradition" to demonstrate the way for understanding of the next hymn (Lohse 1971:40).

## ii. The structure of the Hymn (Col 1:15-20)

The structure (see Appendix 1) shows that the hymn in Colossians 1:15-20 is especially rich in poetic devices. The hymn can be "easily divided" into two stanzas (Dunn 1997:175)<sup>13</sup>, each starting with the relative pronoun ὅς. In the structure (see Appendix 1) we have identified parallels between the stanzas which include the consecutive repetition ὅς ἐστιν, πρωτότοκος, ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ, δι' αὐτοῦ and εἰς αὐτὸν. Antithetical repetition ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς (expanded in the first stanza and short in the second)<sup>14</sup> marks the borders of the hymn (Lohse 1971:43).

Each stanza includes a chiasm, which emphasizes the universal scope of the creative and redemptive activity of Christ. Due to the extended syntax of the subordinate clause at the end of the hymn, the chiasm in 1:19-20a is not as apparent as the chiasm in 1:15-16a. Indeed, it is quite difficult to identify the subject to the verb εὐδόκησεν. The size of this work does not allow a

<sup>12</sup> See Dunn 1996:68, Barth & Blanke 1994:185, Lohse 1971:40.

<sup>13</sup> See Antonini 1995:238, Lohse 1971: 41 too.

discussion of all the possible answers to this question. So we will only state our reasons for agreeing) with Abbott and Litt, who offer strong reasons to justify that πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα is the subject (Abbott & Litt 1991:218-9). Garth Moeller provides the following explanation: πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα (“the entirety (of the “Cosmos”)”) and τὰ πάντα (“all”) are synonymous, as are κατοικῆσαι (“to dwell”) and ἀποκαταλλάξαι (“to reconcile”). Since the verb εὐδόκησεν serves as a predicative of the compound verbal predicate for πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα and is singular, it is the subject of τὰ πάντα; the participle εἰρηνοποιήσας easily refers to both clauses (see Appendix 5).

The semantic center of the hymn is found between the two stanzas (1:17-18a). The verse 1:17 is a chiasm. The presence of τὰ πάντα allows us to correlate it to the chiasms in 1:15-16 and 1:19-20 where this noun is also used. Not all researchers agree that verse 18 is a part of the original version of the entire hymn (1:15-20) and attribute its insertion to the author of the epistle (Lohse 1:17-18a). However, the emphatic repetition of καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν in 1:17-18a (Barth & Blanke 1994:228) demonstrates the integrity of the passage. Apparently, 1:17 is a paraphrase of the first stanza, which is also cosmological. And 1:18a not only conveys the soteriological conception of the second stanza, but it also intensifies the emphasis and even introduces some paradox through τῆς ἐκκλησίας. Nevertheless, the unity of the hymn as we see it in the Colossians is quite evident.

Thus, we could see that the Hymn in Colossians 1:15-20 stands out from the context, not only because of its poetic structure, but also because it has an invitation (the Little hymn). The double accent in this passage of the epistle (1:15-20) — its unusual organization and special introduction — speaks to the fact that the author considered this piece to be the key passage. The author used various devices to attract the readers’ attention to the contents of the Hymn. Later, we shall see for what reason Paul did it. But for now, our concern is to establish the fact that the author of the epistle emphasizes the Christological theme.

## **2.1.2 The Household code: the foundation of social relationships**

### **2.1.2.1 General information**

Instructions on ethics in various forms are often found in the NT. Among them, we can single out instructions regarding the relationships between the members of οἶκος (ancient family), which are commonly called “household codes” or *Haustafel*’s.

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<sup>14</sup> Perhaps, there was no disturbance of the balance in the original version of the hymn (Barth & Blanke 1994:229).



It should be noted that the concept of οἶκος was much broader than the contemporary concept of a family. It included not only a husband and wife, their children and their parents, but also the servants and slaves, who belonged to the household (see Towner 1993:418).

The presence of a household code in the text, as opposed to the presence of a hymn, is identified by its subject and not by the structure. That's why, NT household codes include passages of various structures with the only common feature — consecutive listing of the duties of the members of οἶκος: husbands and wives, children and parents, slaves and their masters. Besides Col 3:18-4:1, household codes are also found in Eph 5:21-6:9 and 1 Peter 2:18-3:7. In addition to these there are some passages on ethical norms in Rom 13, Titus 2:1-10, 1 Tim 2:8-15, 6:1-2 (Tevs 1999:64, Jeffers 1999:86), which also resemble the household code format.

The opinions of researchers regarding the sources of the household code found in the NT are far from unanimous/unified. On the one hand, semantic and functional parallels are found both in Jewish, and ancient Greek, literature. Lohse cites a few samples from Polybius, Epictetus, Diogenes and Seneca and points out that the one who came the closest to the NT ideas was Philo. It was he, who wrote: “the lower class should honor and respect the superior class while the superior class should care for the lower class” (Lohse 1971:155-156, see also Dunn 1996:242-244). But still “no exact formal parallels have been unearthed” (Towner 1993:418-9). Were the NT household codes introduced by Christians themselves or adapted from existing gentile or Jewish forms? The distinction between NT and non-Christian concepts of the structures and duties of a “family” is, of course, their Christological understanding of the mutual duties of believers (see Lohse 1971:156). And as we will see, Christology is the foundational element of the Colossians' Household code.

### ***2.1.2.2 The structure of the Household code 3:17-4:1***

The Colossians' *Haustafel* consists of three addresses made to the three social pairs that constituted the ancient οἶκος. The apostle begins by admonishing those who according to the Jewish Scripture (Gen.2:23, 24) were in the closest bonds with each other — husbands and wives. Then he addresses children and parents (meaning not just the two but more generations). And the last section is addressed to those members of the οἶκος, who were not relatives but were bonded by the social-economic reasons — slaves and their masters.

Despite the seeming similarity, the address to slaves and masters differs from those of the two pairs mentioned before. In the first place, the admonition towards slaves according to Barth and Blanke is “disproportionately detailed” (1994:462). The commentators who observed this disproportionality explain it by the fact that at the time of writing Colossians, Christianity was spread mainly among people of the lowest status. For this reason, the admonition to slaves was more relevant than the one to their masters (see Lohse 1971:162). In that case, it would be logical to

expect a similar “disproportionately” large emphasis on the social and economic relations in other texts of the NT. However, we see that in the mentioned above household codes in Eph., 1 Peter, Titus and 1 Tim, the issues concerning the subordination in marriage, between people of different age and social groups are treated with equal emphasis.

The scheme in Appendix 2 shows that, in the composition of the household code as a whole, the address to the masters is not only “quantitatively” disproportionate to that of the slaves, but also structurally distinct from those directed to the other “stronger” groups. As he addresses each of the social pairs, the Apostle admonishes the submission of the “weak” side (wives, children and slaves) on Christological grounds, encouraging his readers to think about the Lord: ...ὡς ἀνῆκεν ἐν κυρίῳ, ...τοῦτο γὰρ εὐάρεστόν ἐστι ἐν κυρίῳ and ...τοῦτο γὰρ εὐάρεστόν ἐστι ἐν κυρίῳ. Conversely, Paul admonishes the duty of the “strong” to take care of those who submit to them, merely by calling his readers (husbands and fathers) to act for the good of their subordinates, and does not include any theological reasons: ...μη πικραίεσθε πρὸς αὐτάς, ...ἵνα μη ἀθυμῶσιν. Only the address to the masters stands out from the composition whose just treatment of slaves is also based on faith in Christ: εἰδότες ὅτι καὶ ὑμεῖς ἔχετε κυρίον ἐν οὐρανῷ. The scheme in Appendix 2 shows clearly that 4:1 has its own structure: the author plays with the word κύριος to demonstrate to the readers that masters of slaves are at the same time slaves to God.

There is also a syntactical difference between Paul’s address to masters and his admonitions to the other members of the οἶκος. In verses 3:18-22, we see the following sequence of parts of the sentence — address (subject), predicate, indirect object, and adverbial modifier. In verse 4:1, the sequence is — address (subject), direct object, indirect object, predicate. So we see that οἱ κύριοι turn out to differ from the common structure.

The admonition to masters is unexpected rhythmically as well. Expanded (compared to verses 18, 19, 20 and 21) reasoning of Paul in 3:22 creates an impression of completeness of the passage 3:18-21. Because of it, the absence of the balancing-pair to οἱ δούλοι (such a pair have both αἱ γυναῖκες and τὰ τέκνα) is not evident until we come across οἱ κύριοι in verse 4:1.

Traditionally, the borders of the household code in Colossians are marked by verses 3:18-4:1 (see Lohse 1971:154, Barth & Blanke 1994:432, Abbott & Litt 1991:293, Dunn 1996:242, Hurriss 1991:177 and others). However, we think that the structural composition of the household code in Colossians finds its beginning in 3:17 and its end in 3:25. The clearest indicator of the borders of the passage is the repetition of ὁ τί ἐάν ποιῆτε in verses 17 and 23. Barth and Blanke point out that the household code “stands under the superscript” of verse 3:17 (Barth & Blanke 1994:474); H.C.G.Moule also notes that 3:17 and 3:23 coincide but he does not say that these verses are parallel (Moule 1902:130, 133). It is not as evident that the parallel of verses 17 and 23-



24a is triple — besides the mentioned above phrase ὅ τι ἐὰν ποιῆτε (“in all that you do”), we can see that the coincidence of the consecutive mentioning of κύριος (case with a preposition) and a participle. Besides, verse 3:17 contains a participle εὐχαριστοῦντες, and because of it, can be set forth as an opening to the Household code due to the same reasons as in 1:12 in the passage containing the Hymn (see section 2.2.1.2.i)

Verses 3:24b-25 represent a type of a coda of the composition. Here we see a chiasm based on assonance of syllables and a repetition of words derived from the same stem. The code is framed by two predicates (simple and compound nominal). Two syllables of the first predicate and the nominal part of the compound predicate are almost homonymous —

ἀπολήμψεσθε  
προσωπολημψία

In spite of the difference meaning (“take back, receive” and “predilection, partiality”), these words are cognates. The first one (ἀπολήμψεσθε) is the future tense of the verb ἀπολαμβάνω; the second (προσωπολημψία) is derived from a noun προσωπον (person) and verbal adjective ληπτεος (Sobolevsky 1958:II, 1426). Even though ληπτεος also is derived from the verb λαμβάνω, verbal noun προσωπολημψία as well as the verb προσωποληπτεω can only be found in the NT (Sobolevsky, *ibid.*). It is possible that these words were made up by the author of the text (at least, they were definitely not commonly-used). Thus, we should acknowledge that this sound similarity could have been achieved only consciously.

The second parallel is not as sophisticated but is also worthy of attention. The author used not only words with the same stem ἀδικῶν and ἠδίκησεν but sound similarity of the definite article ὁ and the demonstrative pronoun ὁ (this).

It should be pointed out that from the syntactic point of view, verses 3:24b make up a subordinate clause supplying the content of the knowledge represented by the participle εἰδότες. and for this reason the coda is inseparable from the admonition itself.<sup>15</sup> As opposed to the coda, verse 4:1 is a complete sentence. We want to reiterate that it is not until we read the admonition addressing the masters and go back and notice that “slaves” in 3:22 had not a corresponding partner to form a pair.

Analyzing the facts that the admonition to masters and other members of the οἶκος are set far apart and are not structurally consistent, we can conclude that verse 4:1 is not a structural element of the household code. The absence of the admonition to masters would not hurt the compositional unity of the passage and on the contrary, its sudden appearance after the coda

somewhat surprises the reader. The admonition reaches its climax in the coda and we can assume that the author (Paul) only after writing the household code noticed that he did not mention masters. Not only the isolated character of the admonition to masters supports this assumption, but also by the vague organization of all verses following the household code (see section iii of part 2.1.2.2.).

We could see that the structure of the household code in Colossians is very distinct — admonition to members of the οἶκος are given actually in the poetic form. We may conclude that the passage under consideration in Colossians 3:17-4:1 was thoroughly planned. Maybe it existed, partially or in whole, (3:17-24a or 3:24b-25) perhaps independently even before Paul decided to use it in his epistle. One way or another, we are sure that the apostle consciously wrote his ethical admonition in this highly artistic manner. In the next part, we will discuss the purposes why he did it.

### 2.1.3 The purposes of use of the literary forms

Having studied the structure of the Hymn and the Household code in Colossians, we were able to conclude that Paul either composed these passages with great care and effort or he adapted pre-existing pieces. We can see that both passages are extraordinary because in both of them particular methods were used to draw attention to the subject matter. This is all the more significant in light of the fact that Paul, more than any other NT writer, explicitly avoids and rejects the use of σοφία λόγου (rhetorical sophistry, or “human wisdom”, 1Cor 1.17 NIV) in his writings).<sup>16</sup>

It seems apparent that the use of poetry primarily reflects the regard the author has for his subject matter. And even though we do not discard the possibility of Paul’s conscious, deliberate employment of special literary forms,<sup>17</sup> still, we should consider the possibility of his unconscious, intuitive use of poetic structures. Understood in this way, the presence of poetic elements in Colossians speaks more to the deep emotional involvement with which Paul wrote than of a well-thought out and devised rhetorical trick.

The structure of the discussed fragments in Colossians (1:15-20 and 3:16-4:1) demonstrates that they are a hymn and household code respectively and thus belong to the “texts of increased importance.” The use of such texts allows their enhancement to impact the reader, capture and keep the attention of the reader (or listener), and make him not only accept the information formally, but respond to it.

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<sup>15</sup> It is not the fact that the whole coda is one compound clause. The phrase τῷ κυρίῳ Χριστῷ δουλεύετε has no subordinating conjunction, so 24c-25 can be an independent compound sentence. In this case its connection to εἰδότες is provided by the composition of coda.

<sup>16</sup> For more details see section 1.2.3.

<sup>17</sup> It would be an inconsequence, because there is the very harmonious structure of the epistle, as we will see in section 2.2.3.



We can assume that these especially emotionally-charged fragments of the epistle occur at particularly significant moments in the epistle and consequently have the key value for understanding of the main ideas of the epistle. So, the presence in Colossians of these “texts of increased importance” (see section 1.2.2) helps us not only appreciate the significance of the idea being highlighted, but also understand the composition of the entire epistle more distinctly.

## **2.2 The composition of the epistle to the Colossians**

### **2.2.1 The assumed composition of the epistle to the Colossians**

Researchers describe differing versions of the composition of the epistle to the Colossians. Taking each of them [into consideration], we would like to set forth our vision of the structure of the epistle. This structure is based on the presumable structure, which was described in section 1.3.

- I. Epistolary opening 1:1-8
  1. The author and the recipient (1:1-2)
  2. The greeting (1:3a)
  3. Thanksgiving (1:3b-8)
- II. The Body 1:9-4:6
  1. Introduction: the Supremacy of Christ and warning (1:9-23)
  2. The Main part (1:24-3:16)
    - i. Thesis: to reach perfection in Christ (1:24-2:5)
    - ii. Development of the thesis: practical guidelines (2:6-3:16)
      - a. Keep the Orthodoxy which you were taught (2:6-15)
      - b. Rejection of heresy (2:16-23)
      - c. Set your minds on things above (3:1-4)
      - d. Do not commit evil works (3:12-16)
      - e. Do good works (3:12-16)
  3. Conclusion: *Oikos* sanctified by Christ (3:17-4:1)  
Final admonition (4:1-6)
- III. Epistolary closing 4:7-18
  1. Personal remarks (4:7-9)
  2. Greetings (4:10-17)
  3. Paul’s signature (4:18)

### **2.2.2 Epistolary opening 1:1-8 and epistolary closing 4:7-9**

Although Paul first mentions his praying about Colossians in 1:3b, the passage 1:4-8 does not contain the prayer. After this brief mentioning, there is a detailed description of reasons that urges Paul to pray and finally write to the Colossian church (1:4-8).<sup>18</sup> The apostle has to mention the prayer in 1:9, to again bring back the reader to the subject of the letter. Thus, everything

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<sup>18</sup> The participle *προσευχομενοι* is in the present tense, so it expresses the action, which is parallel to the main verb *εὐχαριστοῦμεν*. The participle *ἀκουσαντες* is aorist, which means that its action precedes to the action of the main verb and that the participle is the circumstantial (adverbial) participle (see Blass & Debrunner 1999:340-341, #1372-1375).



mentioned in 1:1-8, despite its close connection to the following text of the epistle, describes a specific epistolary situation, and because of that, can be classified as the epistolary opening.

At the end of the epistle, Paul recalls again the specific circumstances — he sends greetings and gives brief recommendations for his fellow-workers. However, the epistolary closing is especially interesting from the viewpoint of analyzing goals of Colossians and NT epistles in general, “Tychicus will tell you all the news about me .... with Onesimus ... They will tell you everything that is happening here” (4:7-9, NIV). At the end of quite a lengthy epistle, Paul asks his courier to pass along *verbally*, in the interest of time or space, the very personal information, which usually comprises the heart of personal letters. In 4:16, the apostle commands that this epistle be read in another church, too. In this way, Paul himself raises the level of his writing above the everyday issues and consciously focuses on matters of eternal and extra-ordinary value. On the other hand, the presence of the epistolary closing reveals the author’s warm relationship with his correspondents. Even though Paul personally knew only several members of the congregation (1:4-8), the closing proves that all of them were in unity with each other through belonging to the Church.

Thus, in the epistle to the Colossians, there are elements proving that this document belongs to the epistolary style. Moreover, the opening, body and closing of the epistle are closely related. The undeniable presence of the epistolary opening and the closing of the body of the letter proves the authenticity of the epistle. The body of the epistle is full of addresses to readers, which would be hard to interpret without the context. Nevertheless, we should remember that Colossians is not merely writing a personal letter to a group of friends, but an epistle to the Church.

### **2.2.3 The body of the epistle 1:9-4:6**

#### ***2.2.3.1 Introduction: supremacy of Christ and warning for believers 1:9-23***

Many researchers view 1:3b-23 as a whole passage, treating 1:9-23 as a quotation of Paul’s prayer mentioned in 1:3b (NTG, GNT, Dunn 1996:41, McArthur 1992:9, Porkony 1991:24, and others). However, in spite of the fact that verses 3-8 and 9-23 have lexical parallels (Lohse 1971:24), we thought it necessary to refer the first fragment as the epistolary opening and the second fragment as the body of the epistle. It should be noted that the passage 1:3-8 is a thanksgiving (εὐχαριστοῦμεν... προσευχόμενοι), while προσευχόμενοι is just a participle serving as a circumstantial adverbial modifier; the main verb is εὐχαριστοῦμεν. In the passage 1:9-23 the predicate is οὐ παύομεθα... προσευχόμενοι καὶ αἰτούμενοι, i.e. the main verb expresses a prayer and a request. That is why we think that a prayer mentioned by Paul in 1:3b is not identical to the prayer in 1:9-23.

Other researchers break up 1:9-23, starting the theological or the teaching section (Lohse (1971: vii) and Barth and Blanke (1994:42) with verse 12; Antonini (1995:235) and Wall (1993:30) with verse 13; McArthur (1992:9) with the verse 15) and continue it up to the end of the second chapter. We agree that 1:12 and 1:15 begin new fragments (the Little hymn and the Hymn) but we insist on the fact that 1:9-23 is an integral unit. Our opinion is based on the presence of the structure of this unit (see below) and on the fact that Paul's description of his ministry, which is located between the introduction and the development of the thesis cannot be viewed as an argument.<sup>19</sup>

The passage in verses 9-23 of the first chapter in the epistle to the Colossians represents a complete and comprehensive testimony about how Paul prays for the Colossians. KB singles out this piece into a separate passage; Piper (1949:287) and Wright<sup>20</sup> (1991:44) also note the unity of the passage. The opening prayer in the epistle to the Colossians (as well as that of other NT epistles) turns into admonition and encouragement for Christians. This passage is a good example that any public prayer serves to admonish the listeners (1 Cor 14:2-26) and for this reason can be interpreted as a sermon of some sort. By telling about his prayer, Paul indirectly instructs the Colossians regarding the spiritual life (1:9-11 and 1:22b-23). The Christological theme in this passage prevails to the point that we can state that the passage 1:9-23 of the epistle to the Colossians is a Christological hymn, framed by comments about the great God the Father and duties of believers.

### ***2.2.3.2 The Main part***

#### **i. The ministry of Paul and the purpose of the epistle 1:24-2:5**

Verse 1:24 contains a transitional formula  $\nu\tilde{\nu}\nu$  χαίρω (Lohse 1971:68) which starts the passage about Paul's ministry. Although the transition to this new part of the letter is very smooth, the verses 1:24-25 refer to, or even directly repeat 1:18, 23. The change of the subject is evident and most researchers start a new section with 1:24 (see below).

The unity of the passage 1:24-2:5 does not seem apparent to researchers. For this reason, some consider verses 2:1-5 to be sequential to 1:24-29 (Dunn 1996:41, 128), while others have found independent parts (Abbott & Litt 1991:237, McArthur 1992:69). Indeed, 2:1 contains a formula, which usually denotes a shift to a new idea: θέλω γὰρ ὑμᾶς εἰδέναι (see Kovelman 1988:72, Aune 200:186).<sup>21</sup> The passages in 1:24-29 and 2:1-5 somewhat differ from each other in content. The first speaks about Paul's ministry in general. The second is designed for the apostle's addressees. Nevertheless, we think that within the framework of the entire contents of the letter, the

<sup>19</sup> Compare it to Paul's argumentation in 2 Cor 12. Our understanding of the passage is below.

<sup>20</sup> But we do not think that this fragment is "Prayer and Meditation" as Wright thinks (ibid.). The meaning of the fragment will be shown below.



thematic unity of the passage is quite evident and thus the passage 1:24-2:5 should be treated as a coherent unit (also see Lohse 1971:68, Barth & Blanke 1994:252, Martin 1991:99; Pokorny 1991:95).

Even though the “thesis” segment in 1:24-2:5 is not characterized by a clear structure, this passage cannot be called a simple prose. Vivid images describing Christ (1:24, 2:3) and the gospel (1:25-27) can be taken as “echos” of the hymn 1:15-20. The chiasm in 1:28, enhanced by the emphatic repetition *τα παντα*, is particularly expressive. The center of the chiasmus is *διδάσκειν πάντα άνθρωπον ἐν πάσῃ σοφία*, the essence of Paul’s ministry.

As we have already noted, the public character of the epistle to the Colossians makes it almost an encyclical message. Evidently, the purposes set in Colossians coincide with the purposes of the apostle’s ministry for the Catholic Church. Moving on to the goals of the specific letter, Paul focuses on his direct addressees while keeping in mind his indirect addressees:

*ὅσοι οὐχ ἑώρακαν το πρόσωπόν μου ἐν σαρκί* (2:1), so he emphasizes again the public nature of the epistle. Nevertheless, the goals of the letter are still made narrower and more concrete:

*ἵνα μησεῖς ἡμᾶς παραλογίζηται ἀπόκριφοι* (2:4).

Thus, in 1:24-2:5 Paul does not introduce any specific thesis, but establishes the goals of the epistle — to admonish believers and warn them against possible danger of false teaching.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, we cannot state that this extract is a thesis in its full sense. Rather, it is the author’s “presentation of intentions”. However, we still call this passage a “thesis” to reflect the structural function of the fragment in the epistles.

Some researchers (Abbott & Litt 1991:237, McArthur 1992:9) think that the passage continues up to 2:7. Later, we shall explain why we do not take such variant as acceptable.

## **ii. Paul’s admonition 2:6-3:16**

We support the definition of the beginning of the new section with the verse 2:6 by the fact that, starting with this verse and up to the verse 3:12, each subsection (2:6-15, 16-19, 20-23, 3:1-4, 5-11, 12-16) starts with the conjunction *οὖν* in combination with a second-plural, imperatival verb in the present tense. This shows the homogeneity of the passage 2:6-3:16.

Balz and Schneider note that in the NT *οὖν* “functions as an inferential and connective conjunction except in statements..., commands..., and questions...” (Balz & Schneider 1981:II, 542). The passage under consideration is not a narration or a commandment, nor does it contain any questions. That is why we think that in Colossians the conjunction *οὖν* is used in inferential and

<sup>21</sup> It is worthy to notice that Abbott and Little do not say that *θέλω γὰρ ὑμᾶς εἰδέναι* is the cause of their separating of the fragment.

<sup>22</sup> For more details see section 3.1.1.



connective meaning. The conjunction is a “marker of result, often implying the conclusion of a process of reasoning — so, therefore, consequently, accordingly, then, so then” (Louw & Nida 1988:I, 783). Therefore, the repetitive use of the conjunction οὖν points not only towards the unity of the passage 2:6-3:16 and the distinction of this passage from the previous passage of the epistle (1:24-2:5), but towards the relation of them both (2:6-3:16 and 1:24-2:5). That is why we thought it appropriate to place the part under the title of: “The development of the thesis,” implying that the thesis itself was stated previously by the author of the epistle. Indeed, the entire section 2:6-3:16 is dedicated to admonitions that are first mentioned in 1:28. By complying with these admonitions, the readers will be able to avoid dangers of backsliding and accepting wrong teachings. Therefore, 2:6-3:16 allows Paul to reach his goal stated in 2:4.

It is interesting to note that each of the units of “The development of the thesis” contains either a positive or a negative exhortation.<sup>23</sup> In the center of the chiasmus found in 3:1-4, there is a verse, which reveals certain parallels with the introduction and conclusion of the body of the epistle. The chiastic verses 3:1-2 repeat a Christological hymn in the first chapter, and the concept of the reward in the coming Kingdom in 3:4 corresponds to the teaching about the reward stated in the household code (3:24-25). The remaining central verse 3:3 represents a statement of the reason, which both encourages and makes it feasible for the Colossians to fulfill everything the apostle urges his readers to do.

### ***2.2.3.3 Conclusion: appeal 3:17-4:1***

The alternation of positive and negative admonitions is finally broken by the household code. The section 3:17-4:1 does not have the particle οὖν typical of all the aspects of the Development of the thesis. Besides that, the household code has a positive intention, as well as the following right on the positive admonitions of the previous unit 3:12-16. So the code falls out from the accepted chiastic pattern of the development of the thesis. Due to this reason, the household code has its own distinct and developed composition and we cannot view it as a continuation of the fragment 3:12-16. Thus, we single out the household code as a separate element of the epistle.

Cicero wrote that the conclusion should contain an “expanded intensification of arguments..., and everything [in it] should be directed towards the maximal excitement” (*Or. II*, 81/332). This description is quite suitable to the household code. The author lists in it not general but specific recommendations appealing to each of them in the Lord. The coda of the Household code raises the issue of reward and punishment. The specific, almost poetic tone of the household

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<sup>23</sup> In the beginning of 3:5-11 subsection we see the exhortation which is positive formally, but its essence is negative: νεκρώσατε... ἀπόθεσθε... μὴ ψεύδεσθε...

code, which differs dramatically from the smooth and moderated development of the thesis, produces a special emotional impact on the readers.

It looks like, after this impressive conclusion, that it is time to finish the epistle and move on to the epistolary closing proper. Nevertheless, Paul continues his admonition.

#### **i. Final admonitions 4:2-6**

It can seem quite challenging to try to classify the passage 4:2-6. Difficulties arise at the point of identifying the borders of the passage — the admonition to masters by its structure falls out from the context of the general admonition to the members of the *oikos*.<sup>24</sup> From the point of view of its structure, 4:1 can sooner be united with the series of incidental admonitions in verses 2-6 in chapter 4 of Colossians.<sup>25</sup> Besides, we can only guess that in 4:2 Paul has already finished his admonition to masters and address to all the community independently of social status of his readers.

Researchers have noted the ambiguity of the function Colossians 4:2-6. The location of the passage (right before the epistolary closing) urges us to treat it as the conclusion of the body of the epistle. However, the lack of a summarizing quality in this passage, which is by definition expected in a conclusion, does not allow us to do so. Researchers have tried to resolve the issue by calling the piece “Final Admonitions” (Lohse 1971:164), “Concluding Petitions and Exhortations” (Barth & Blanke 1992:451) and others.<sup>26</sup> We see that in the names of the passage cited are drawn mainly from its location in the text and not from its contents. Because of the ambiguity of the contents of 4:2-6, Abbott and Litt put it under the title almost rephrasing it in the following way:

Exhortation to constant prayer and thanksgiving, to which as added the apostle’s request that they would pray for himself in his work. Practical advise as to wisdom action and speech (Abbott & Litt1991:296).

On the one hand, verses 4:2-9 are so distinctly separated from the development of the thesis by the Household code that they cannot be viewed as the continuation of the main part of the body of the epistle. On the other hand, they cannot be attributed to the epistolary closing either. Even though verses 4:3-4 convey some personal data and to some extent are connected with 4:7-9, they still function as a continuation of the appeal in 4:2. Besides, being the Final admonitions in Colossians, marks a distinct boundary between the body of the epistle and the epistolary closing containing personal information, greetings and requests. In other words, after a slightly vague,

<sup>24</sup> For more details, see section 2.1.2.2 and Appendix 2.

<sup>25</sup> As was done by those who divided NT texts into chapters and verses: the last phrase of the Household code belongs to the next chapter of the epistle.

<sup>26</sup> See also Patzia 1990:98, and Carson 1963:95.



“poorly-executed” end of the Household code<sup>27</sup> in Colossians, we completely lose track of the structural and stylistic consistency, which characterizes the Body of the epistle. The confusion in verses 4:2-6 creates the impression that the author realized that he has already said everything he had to say and wants to end his admonition, so he adds a few remarks, not trying to employ any special means to convey his mood to the reader. In this manner, the Household code turns out to be the last and the most stylistically vivid (comparable only to the Christological hymn in chapter one) part of Colossians.

Because of this, we consider the passage 4:2-6 to hold an intermediate position between the body conclusion and the epistolary closing and have titled it “Final admonitions”, which do not have any significant rhetorical function, though the contents of the fragment have didactic value.

### **2.3 Rhetorical description of the composition of the epistle to the Colossians**

Thus far we have identified the structure of Colossians based on the formal signs of the borders between the internal elements of the text. In this section, we will analyze what methods were used by Paul to draw the attention of his readers to the most important points of the epistle.

Earlier we set forth the hypothesis that the author of the epistle used certain literary forms — Hymn and the Household code — for a specific purpose.<sup>28</sup> We believe that these specific stylistic and poetic devices allowed him to attract the attention of the readers to the being discussed. Assuming that the poetic structure reflects the emotional involvement of the author and his reader, we created a diagram, which demonstrates these “emotional outbursts” throughout the epistle. In Appendix 4 line E (expressiveness) shows the level of the structural organization of the epistle to the Colossians — the more formal and regular the language that the author uses, the lower line E is; and conversely, the more complex is the structure of the text or the more sincere and informal is the address of the author, the higher is the curve.

Line E reaches its highest point at points Hy (Hymn) and Ha (*Haustafel*) — in the introduction and conclusion of the body of the epistle. In this way, the mentioned fragments highlight the overall text of the epistle and mark the beginning and end of the apostle’s main admonitions. Structurally, the main part of the body of the epistle is a plateau. Throughout this part of Colossians, line E remains at the same level, a bit lower than the climax points. As we have already mentioned, the thesis of the epistle is not characterized by a clear structure, but it still

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<sup>27</sup> It could be named “vague” only from structural point of view, but not from the matter of the Household code (see section 3.3.2.2.).

<sup>28</sup> See section 2.1.3.

contains emphatic constructions and poetic images. The alternation of positive and negative admonitions in the development of the thesis creates a certain rhythm, which enhances the emotional impact.

Line E never falls to point Zero, even when the epistolary opening and closing serve only to convey the necessary information due to the distance between the letter's recipients and the author of the epistle and his helpers. Such expressiveness is reached by the warmth and cordiality of the mentioned fragments. Paul only starts his epistle with the traditional formula "author, recipient, greeting", expanded and very personal in its nature by a thanksgiving, which reflects the sincerity of the apostle's feelings. The epistolary closing is also full of personal greetings and the caring characteristics of many of Paul's helpers, which reveal his deep emotional interest in the people he is addressing.

We believe that the expressiveness of a text has a great impact on the attention of readers and listeners. Because of it, the epistle to the Colossians can be considered to be a wonderful example of rhetorical organization. If we follow the line E in its horizontal development, we will notice that in the first verse, readers can arguably be attracted only by the name of the well-known apostle. However, in the course of Paul's expression of respect and care towards the Colossian readers, they become more interested in his words. Expanded thanksgiving, which reveals the author's fondness of his readers, allows him to smoothly move on to an introductory statement of the main argument of the epistle<sup>29</sup> presented in the prayer-sermon of Paul.

And finally, there comes the climax when the apostle quotes the Hymn, which enchants the readers with its beauty and style.<sup>30</sup> And nobody would dare question the contents. Maybe Paul was quoting a hymn already known to the Colossians, which might even have been written in their church. In that case he shows his respect for, and appeals to the faith of, his addressees. Then the apostle reminds his readers of his status and purpose for his ministry in general and for the writing the epistle in particular. The sacrifices that the apostle has made for the Church cause the listeners to pay close attention to his words. After that, Paul starts a series of admonitions encouraging the Colossians to resist false teachings and strive for righteousness. The central themes of the admonition are death to sin and resurrection for glory in Christ. The apostle ends his admonition with a highly emotional appeal "to do everything as if for the Lord" (3:17, 23), and continues with precise guidelines as to what exactly that means. The expressiveness and unity of the appeal leaves no room for doubt regarding its relevance and practicability. The last admonitions before the

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<sup>29</sup> For more details see Chapter Three of this work.

<sup>30</sup> We remember, that premordially the apostle's epistles were read aloud in the community.



Epistolary closing, in spite of the fact that they may seem confused, still roll on the crest of the “emotional wave” of the *Haustafel*.

As it was mentioned before, the epistolary closing proper is full of personal addresses leaving the impression of a warm meeting and friendly talk. Besides that, epistolary opening and closing, these two necessary elements of the epistolary genre emphasize the cordiality of the relationship and sincere care of the author about the lives of his readers. They create an atmosphere of intimacy and trust. One of the last phrases is, “Remember my chains” (4:18, NKJV). Perhaps, this is not only asking for a prayer, but a reminder of the significant teaching contained in the epistle.

We see that even such elements of the epistle as the epistolary opening and closing, which appear at first to be mere formalism, do not distract, but, on the contrary, serve to enhance the emotional impact of the message. We can describe Paul’s letter to the Colossians, as well as most epistles in the NT, as “emotionally charged”, because as we have already stated many times, there are evidences of genuine fellowship between the authors and their letters’ recipients.

The most vivid and emotionally charged fragments of the text are the body introduction and body conclusion. It looks like it was not by mere chance that the author included the Hymn and the Household code at these points, in order to attract the attention of readers to such seemingly different subjects as the supremacy of Christ and social relationships. There is a sufficient basis to state that because the composition of Colossians is built around the Hymn in the first chapter, and the Household code in the chapter three, as well as reasoning of the apostle, that these two dominant pieces are the foci of the epistle.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to uncover the compositional and rhetorical peculiarities of the epistle to the Colossians. Our task was to identify the parts, into which the epistle should be divided, and to determine the sequence, in which the author developed his ideas, and identify the methods he used to convey his ideas to the reader.

We started our work with the discussion of the two fragments of Colossians, the unity of which is most evident — namely, with the definition and analysis of the Christological Hymn and the Household code. We noted that the use of specific literary forms in the epistle was not so much to produce a certain effect, but because the author was deeply interested in the issues and lives of his readers. The presence of these two vivid fragments in Colossians and the identification of their borders help us to study the composition of the entire epistle further. The Hymn and the Household

code are the two fragments, which are especially expressive and emotionally charged, serving as highlights, marking the key places of the composition of Colossians.

In the second part of this chapter, we were concerned with a close study of the text of the epistle and the identification of its composition. We made the assumption that, because Colossians is not a private letter but was originally designed as an open message to a large group of people, the structure of the epistle had to be based on the general principles of rhetoric — the commonly accepted standards for public speeches, along with the addition of certain inevitable elements of the epistolary genre. Thus we began with an identification of the borders of the epistolary opening and closing and only then turned to an analysis of the body of the epistle.

An analysis of the composition of the body of the epistle was made according to the principles of identifying complete and structurally-sound fragments. Thus, the passage 1:9-23 containing the Hymn and its immediate context was determined to be the body introduction. Verses 1:24-2:5 were named the Thesis of the epistle, specifying that they primarily contain the aims of the epistle. The large passage in 2:6-3:16 — the Development of the thesis and Household code in 3:17-4:1 were called the body conclusion. We could observe that, in spite of the general smoothness of the structure of the epistle to the Colossians, the compositional function of 4:2-6 is hard to define. Vagueness in the conclusion, along with the conditionality of the thesis, speak to the rhetorical imperfection of the epistle, which is explained by the fact that the author of the epistle Paul, never was, and never claimed to be, a professional speaker.

In the conclusion of this chapter, after we defined and described our version of the composition of Colossians, we noted its rhetorical soundness. We demonstrated that throughout the epistle, the attention of readers (listeners) of the apostle does not decrease, and due to the use of rhetorical methods, the most important points in the epistle — the beginning of the body (introduction) and its end (conclusion) — have more emotional charge. Thus, we verified that the proposed description of the composition of the epistle is relevant and sound.

We also proposed that the author of the epistle stylistically marked which fragments were most important to convey his ideas. In this way, the analysis of the composition of Colossians allowed us to understand the course of reasoning of the apostle. In the next chapter, we will explore why the author of Colossians thought it important to highlight certain elements of the epistle. We will focus on the influence of the body introduction and the Christological Hymn, in particular, in the first chapter, on the development of the thesis and the conclusion of the body of the epistle.



## **Chapter Three**

### **The Rhetoric of Colossians:**

#### **Christology as the basis, measure and end of ethical admonition**

The name of this chapter contains its thesis that declares that Paul's teaching about Christ played a role of key importance in his ethical exhortation. In order to prove the truth of this statement, we have to make the following steps. First, we will define the purposes of the epistle, using the material of the previous chapter, that was dedicated to the composition and rhetorical methods of Colossians. Then we will investigate the two main themes — Christology and ethics, — which were given very special attention by the author of Colossians. The analysis of the organization of Paul's reasoning will enable us to define what tools he uses to achieve the purposes that he had set before himself.

#### ***3.1 The purpose of the epistle: the admonition of believers***

The purpose of Colossians, as well as that of any other New Testament letter, could be expressed by the author both directly and indirectly. The author may not always want to tell the readers directly what purpose he is pursuing. In order to understand the purposes of Paul in Colossians most clearly and precisely, we need to analyze both the direct and indirect indications of the author's purpose in this text.

##### **3.1.1 Exhortation of the believers**

We cannot say that Paul expresses the purposes of his letter quite definitely. If this were the case, there would be no discussion on the matter. The discussion about the purposes of Colossians has two directions.

Some of the researchers understand this epistle as a dispute with some false teachers. In this case, the main problem is to identify Paul's opponents. It has been suggested that the false teaching, opposed by the apostle in Colossians, was both the Judaist legalistic interpretation of Christ's message and the syncretic, mystical, gnostic cults of the Near East (see Barth & Blanke 1994:44-48, and Duling & Perrin 1994:269-271, Lohse 1971:127-131, MacArthur 1992:6-8). Barth and Blanke call the task of identifying the false teachers that Paul confronts an "unsolved puzzle" (Barth & Blanke 1994:39).

The second interpretation of the epistle's purposes is the suggestion that Paul does not confront a particular false teaching but wants to give a general warning (Carson, Moo, Morris 1993:337, O'Brien 1993b:148-149).

Both groups of researcher are united by the confidence that the epistle is of polemical character and by the concentration on the rather small fragment of text — 2:8-23. We think that any statement concerning the epistle in general (as, for example, definition of its purposes) must be proved by the whole text of the epistle, and must take into consideration the specific peculiarities of its composition. In the first chapter of this work, we suggested that the author should express the purposes of the letter immediately after the Introduction, in the verses 1:24-2:5.<sup>31</sup>

We should not be surprised that in the "thesis" of the letter apostle speaks rather about his ministry in general than about his desires for the particular church. More than once we have mentioned that Paul himself understood Colossians as almost cathedral epistle. Addressing his readers the author speaks about his desire to comfort and teach them (2:2-4), and that the purpose of his preaching is "to present everybody perfect in Christ." That is why we think that the purpose of Colossians is the comfort and exhortation of all of Paul's wide audience. Therefore, the mention of false teachings is just one of the aspects of the apostle's exhortations, and that the teaching purposes of the epistle are not limited to the dogmatic confrontation. Therefore, it is not polemics, but exhortation that is the foremost task of the epistle, and that is confirmed by the epistle's character.<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless, "exhortation" is only a general characterization of the epistle. Its substance and form totally depend on the audience that Paul addresses. So, whom did the apostle address?

### **3.1.2 The identity of Paul's recipients**

The conventional title of the epistle, which is the object of our research, is "to the Colossians." Though the Colossian Church is mentioned by Paul as a direct addressee of the letter (1:2), the truth is that originally the author realized that his audience would be much more wide (2:1-2, 4:13,15-16). Therefore, the absence of the records (outside the NT) about a Colossian church and the religious life in this city in the first century CE (Wright 1971:22) must not get us confused when we try to reconstruct the portrait of the letter's addressees. Under the hypothesis that the real addressee of the apostle was the numerous churches of the Asia Minor, we have the right to use the information from the sources about social and political situation in the eastern provinces or the Roman Empire in I CE. Nevertheless, the text of the letter to Colossians itself remains a valuable and, undoubtedly, reliable source of information about Paul's addressees.

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<sup>31</sup> For more details, see section 1.3.

<sup>32</sup> See section 2.2.3.2.



### ***3.1.2.1 Ethnicity and religious background of Paul's audience***

It is not by accident that we united these two characteristics of Paul's audience. In the ancient times (and this tradition very often remains true today), the religious affiliation of a person was predefined by his nationality. That is why knowing the beliefs of a person or of a group of people, we can speak about his/her or their ethnic belonging with a high probability.

The text of the epistle speaks about the heathen background of the first readers of Paul's letter: 1:12-3, 27, 2:23 and may be, also 3:5-7. We can assume that the cult that the Colossians had adhered to was the typical syncretistic, eastern belief system of the Hellenistic period that combined worshipping the old Hellenic gods and the contemporary mystery religions of that time (Wright 1971:23, Barth & Blanke 1994:10-12). On the other hand, we cannot keep from mentioning the Jewish background of the epistle in the references to circumcision, Scriptures and Sabbath: 2:11, 13-14, 16. There is no doubt that there were synagogues in Colossae because Judaism was broadly represented in all cities of the Roman Empire (Acts 15:21). Barth refers to sources, according to which there were up to 11,000 Jews in the region of Laodicea that were paying a special tax in 60 BCE. "We may estimate that at least 500 of them were in Colossae" (Barth & Blanke 1994:14).

The direct appeal to those who lived "in uncircumcision" (2:13) and Paul's negative remarks concerning the Jewish formalism (2:16,21,22) allow us to make an assumption that the apostle is writing to the Christians that were converted from among the gentiles and who now are being rebuked by somebody (visitors or the community members with Jewish background) for not being submitted to the Law of Moses. Probably, some of the community members were making attempts to use concepts (2:8) and mystical practices (2:18.3:5) peculiar to the heathenism or Hellenistic Judaism. Apparently, Paul was addressing a mixed audience that was starting an active discussion of the value of their past religious experience, whether Jewish or Hellenistic.

We know that the conflicts between Jewish and Gentile converts were not rare in the Early Church (Acts 6:1, 15:1-2, 5, Gal. 2:11-14). Apparently, a similar conflict was brewing in Colossae,<sup>33</sup> for Paul is urging his readers to "put on the new man... where there is neither Greek, nor Jew, circumcision, nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, neither slave nor free" (3:10-11, NKJV).<sup>34</sup> In this way, the community in Colossae even with its relative health (1:4-8) was heterogeneous, and the discussions about the necessity of the Law of Moses and, probably, about the fullness of Christ's incarnation were beginning. The same situation, most likely, could be seen in other churches of the region of Laodicea.

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<sup>33</sup> We think that it was not a real conflict, but rather the danger of one, because in the beginning of his letter Paul calls the church in Colossae the example of faith and love (1:4-8)

<sup>34</sup> Almost every group of the inhabitants of the Roman Empire is presented, and this list is unique for the NT because of its fullness.

### 3.1.2.2 *Social status*

Paul himself never explicitly refers to the social status of his readers. The NT writers in general rarely emphasize what social group they address their letters.<sup>35</sup> In this sense, the Conclusion to the epistle to the Colossians gives us more information than usual. Even though we still cannot say anything specific about the status of Paul's readers in reference to their role in the state or the city community, based on the Household code provided, we can say that Paul's audience reflected the full spectrum of the ancient *oikos*.

Paul classifies the members of the *oikos* into three groups, every group consisting of an opposition pair. Let us take a closer look at the social status of each of them.

#### i. **Wives and husbands**

On the first hand, Paul addresses the foundation of every family — the married couples. Marriage in the ancient world was far from being the example of equal partnership. Quite a lot has been written on the subject,<sup>36</sup> and we can only repeat, that a wife was absolutely dependant on her husband. The economic system and the technical development of the society called forth such social structure, when a woman could not herself make money for living, unless she was a prostitute, and consequently throughout all of her life she was dependant on a man either her father or husband. We must mention that in Rome the status of a woman was higher, whereas the further one traveled east, the less a woman was valued (Sergeenko 1964:190). In Greece a woman's life was strictly limited to housekeeping, and women were called οἰκουρήματα — “staying at home” (Sobolevsky 1956:I/1157). They were “despised almost as slaves” (Bonnar 1992:175), since in the eyes of the Greek one's wife was just the first among the maids (*ibid.*, 179). We can assume that the situation in Colossae, Laodicea and Hierapolis was similar.

The secondary role of women is taken for granted by a significant part of modern society, because it is called forth by the secular traditions and religious teachings. Even more in the ancient world, this state of affairs was taken as to be natural. Nevertheless, in Mediterranean area by the beginning of I CE the situation was somewhat changed. “That century was characterized by breaking of the family ties... and by the desire of women to play self-dependant role in the social life” (Svencickaia 1995:157), by numerous records mentioning women as priestesses, as organizers of festivities, benefactresses of the city states, honorable chairmen of unions and etc. (*ibid.*, 158).

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<sup>35</sup> One of the exceptions is 1 Cor 1:26-28, where Paul says that among his readers there are not many “wise, ... strong, ... noble”. Witherington thinks, that this phrase could mean that there were people of high social status in the Corinthian community (Witherington 1994:22).

<sup>36</sup>See Vardiman 1990, Svencickaja 1995, Bonnard 1995:175-181, Sergeenko 1964:184-198.



The dispute over the role of a woman in the NT<sup>37</sup> shows that the status of women was not plainly clear for many people of that time.

We can make the conclusion that in the period of I BCE - I CE the traditional roles of men and women in the family and in the society begin to be questioned. Women did not want to continue their subservient status, but men wanted things to remain the same. Undoubtedly, such situation could not avoid conflicts, the reflection of which one could see in Colossians as well.

## ii. Fathers and children

In the antiquity a child as the most economically dependent member of the family, who was in absolute submission to his parents. A father was the head of the family and, consequently, he had all the power — over the children as well. This is how Sergeenko describes the power of a father had over his own children in ancient Rome:

The right to throw out the baby, to sell him or even kill belonged to the father... The one who gave life had the right to make any arrangements about it: the famous saying 'Born from me — so die from me' developed in the mind of a Roman into the system of a well-grounded right that was called 'father's power' (*patria potestas*)... Independent of the son's position, of his achievements in life, the father's power over him ends only after his death... Only in the time of Constantine was the execution of a son considered a murder (Sergeenko 1964:148).

Israelites also did not treat children as competent citizens: in the OT we find testimonies of the two human sacrifices, and in both cases a father sacrifices a child (Gen 22, Judg 11). It is interesting that both authors of Genesis and of Judges admit the tragedy of the situation. but none of them questions the ethical propriety of such ministry to God or of the relevance of taking away the life of one's own child.

Paul's appeal *μη ἐρεθίζετε τα τέκνα ὑμῶν, ἵνα μη ἀθυμῶσιν* confronts such an attitude towards those on whom the future of the parents' society depends, but whose status was a little better than status of a slave. And yet, the apostle still insists on the obedience of children. It was not Christianity's goal to devastate the existing social structures, and as is evident from the case of couple "husband-wife" and "master-slave", Paul is just limiting the rights of the stronger side by defining their responsibilities for the weaker.

## iii. Masters and slaves

The last coupled pair, to which Paul writes, is masters and slaves. These two categories of people are not tied to each other by familial connections, but they are none the less interdependent than wives and husbands, or parents and children. The institution of slavery was the foundation of the complete economical system of the antique world and thus the equity of its existence was never

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<sup>37</sup> 1 Peter 3:1-7, 1 Cor 7:3-4, 1:3-12, 14:34-35, Eph 5:22-33, 1 Tim 2:11-15.

questioned. Aristotle thought that there were “people and whole nations that by their nature... are destined for slavery and must be slaves” (*Polit.* II 2, 3, 1255b).<sup>38</sup> The OT also takes slavery for granted and only stipulates the relationship between the master and the slave.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, with the beginning of the Common Era this traditional relationship between the oppressors and the oppressed began to be reconsidered.

Numerous wars connected to the formation and expansion of the Roman Empire demonstrated to the inhabitants of Mediterranean that none of them were exempt from becoming a slave. It caused the society to doubt the hypothesis of Aristotle — and in Rome slavery was no longer considered the natural set of affairs, though it was still recognized as a “legal, international institution” (Sergeenko 1964:262). Nevertheless, “the ideas of liberty, equality and fairness were floating in the air, calling forth the spontaneous protest against social and political oppression” (Elizarova 1972:64).

In Colossians the appeal to the masters falls out of the general structure of the Household code,<sup>40</sup> and this “fact” tells us that code itself was formulated in the period of time, when, or in the community where, faith in the Resurrected Lord had only been spread among the lower sections of the population. Truly, “having no slaves was considered to be the sign of the utmost poverty” (Sergeenko 194:249), which would correspond to a Household code (3:17-25) that only speaks about the family without slaves, and about the slaves themselves.<sup>41</sup> With the spreading of the new faith, there were more and more slaveholder families in the Christian communities. Both slaves and their masters could be members of one congregation, and it is confirmed by the fact that in the NT church is quite often described as a “home church.”<sup>42</sup> It was impossible to avoid the conflicts and misunderstanding (that are rather often described in the NT: James 2:1-7, Philemon, 1Cor 7:21-23, 11:20-22, 1Tim 6:1), when the social status of a person did not match his status as of the member of the Christian community. The appeal both to slaves and to masters proves that among Paul’s addressees there were representatives of both classes with opposing interests.<sup>43</sup>

### ***3.1.2.3 Church in Colossae: a community of contradictions?***

After the brief analysis of the religious background and social status of Paul’s addressees we can conclude that the community he is addressing was not homogeneous. Moreover, it consisted of groups whose ideological, social and economic interests were contradictory to each other’s.

<sup>38</sup> Quote by Sergeenko 1964:262.

<sup>39</sup> Only the slavery of a tribesman is considered to be unnatural (Ex 21:2, Lev 25:39-46).

<sup>40</sup> See section 2.1.2.2

<sup>41</sup> Husband, wife and children all could be masters for their slaves. However, as we found out in the section 2.1.2.2, the composition of the life-setting verses has no intentions for the exhortation of the masters.

<sup>42</sup> Act 16:33, Rom 16:4, 1 Cor 1:11, 16:19, Phlm 1:2 and Col 4:15.

<sup>43</sup> See Tidball 1983:90-103.



These contradictions can be explained not only by the differences in cultural and religious background and social status of the readers. The age when Paul lived and wrote in general is known for the break-up of the usual ties. Kovelman mentions that the result of Roman politics was the emerging of two paradoxical ideas: “the idea of equality, the idea of ‘the man himself’ and (together with that)... a powerful explosion of ethnic and class animosity” (Kovelman 1988:102). These processes could not help but influence the development of the Christian church. On the one hand, the need of a new system of values was beneficial for the spreading of the new faith. On the other hand, the intensification of religious and social contradictions was calling forth conflicts within the congregations. We find echoes of these processes in the New Testament in general and in Colossians in particular.

### 3.1.3 Perfection in Christ: uniting in love

We have observed that Paul sees the exhortation of the believers — their perfection in Christ, as the purpose of his ministry. However, such a purpose appears to be quite abstract: in order to understand how A can become like B, it is necessary to define the parameters of both elements of this problem. We have already described the portrait of Paul's readers. Now we must define what the apostle is calling them to.

Paul himself points out to what he wants the numerous readers of Colossians to be like: *ἵνα παρακλητώσιν αἱ καρδίαι αὐτῶν συμβιβασθέντες ἐν ἀγάπῃ... εἰς πλοῦτος...εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν (2:2)*. The participle *συμβιβασθέντες* is an aorist, meaning that the action of *συμβιβάζω* precedes the action of the main verb (*παρακλητώσιν*). Therefore, first of all the hearts of the believers must be united in love, fullness of joy and knowledge as a means to their comfort.

Thus, the final purpose of Paul is the perfection of Christians, and for that reason he ministers as both a mentor and a comforter. However, perfection in Christ is possible only on the condition of unity, the realization of oneself as a part of a whole — the Church, that is the Body of Christ,<sup>44</sup> and, as we shall see, the apostle highlights this condition for the better attention of his readers.

By admitting the fact of the heterogeneity of his audience, Paul avoids the abstract appeals in his exhortation. The knowledge of the real and possible problems of the community assists him in making the epistle most relevant for its readers. We conclude that the purpose of the exhortations in Colossians is the prevention or neutralization of already emerging conflicts between groups that

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<sup>44</sup> See Col 1:24. You will find in the section 3.2.2.2 more detailed investigation of the matter.

belong to different social classes and/or different cultures. An analysis of Paul's reasoning will show us how he reaches his goal.

### **3.2 Paul's argumentation: the Universal significance of the person and the work of Christ**

#### **3.2.1 Formal indication of the main argument of the epistle**

##### **3.2.1.1 The function of the body introduction**

Above we have determined that the key element of the introduction to the body of epistle to Colossians is the Christological hymn of the first chapter (see section 2.2.2.2). Therefore, the Christological theme is dominant in the introduction. How important is this role of Christology for defining the methodology of Paul in the measure of the researched epistle? In order to answer this it is necessary to determine what functions the introduction has in the whole body of speech.

“The introduction to a speech had threefold goal: to get the attention of the listeners, establish preliminary understandings and a preliminary empathy” (Gasparov 2000a:440). It should not leave our minds that in the epistolary genre we are studying, an introduction has its own peculiarities. In the epistle, and in particular in the letter to Colossians, there are in fact two introductions: the epistolary opening and the introduction into the body of the epistle. One immediately follows the other. However, this does not necessarily mean that the purposes of the body introduction (about which we are talking now) get simplified.

The epistolary opening, especially in the form that we meet in Paul's letters and in the NT letters in general — informal, sincere, rather large and extremely personal — already creates the spirit of trust, that ensures the “preliminary empathy” of the readers. Their attention is already won as well, though at the point of getting to the merits of the case it is necessary to help the readers to concentrate not on the memories of the personal encounter but on considering that very topic which the epistle is dedicated to. The task of “preliminary understanding” neither is fulfilled. So, what should the body introduction be like in order to fulfill its purpose?

Having analyzed the structure of the body introduction, we determined that its composition and especially the presence of a hymn in it certify the special rhetorical effect of the whole fragment 1:9-23. However, as just noted, the introduction is not meant only to attract attention, but this rhetorical aspect also introduces the reader to the subject matter and basic terminology needed in order to understand the rest of the speech or epistle.

Aristotle said that it is the introduction that defines the importance of the matter at hand (*Rh.* III, 1415b/35). Cicero also thought that the beginning of a speech “outlines the contents of the investigated matter in general, strengthens the approach to the matter and provides its beauty and



dignity” (*Or.* II, 79/320). That is why we think it is so important that Paul uses a christological hymn in the body introduction of Colossians. In doing so, the apostle not just attracts the readers’ attention to the letter itself and establishes initial rapport,<sup>45</sup> but he also shows them that the whole concept of Christ plays the important role in his further argumentation. In the Introduction, Paul not just mentions the Lord, he develops the theme of the vital importance and universal significance of the person and work of Christ. The verbosity and the effectiveness of Paul’s reasoning leaves us no doubt that the theme of Christ is declared presented as the most significant in the whole epistle.

### 3.2.1.2 Christ as a key term of the epistle

In the previous section, we mentioned the great attention that ancient authors paid to the introduction. Here is another quote: “the same introductory thoughts that were playing their role in the introduction, must take part in the combat” (*Or.* 80/325). In other words, the author must declare in the introduction the main arguments that he is going to use in the whole speech.

Large and perfectly structured, the body introduction of the epistle to the Colossians is fully dedicated to the description of the universal significance of the person and work of Christ. By use of the hymn, Paul made his introductory sermon-prayer so brilliant that the rest of his argumentation basks in the afterglow. This is not just a subjective impression, for references to the Christological hymn of the first chapter appear throughout the main part of the epistle’s body. Note, for example, the following parallels or even quotations from the hymn:

A	1:18...16 2:10	αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ ... εἴτε ἀρχαί εἴτε ἐξουσίαι ὅς ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας
B	1:19 2:9	ἐν αὐτῷ εὐδόκησεν πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι ἐν αὐτῷ κατοικεῖ πᾶν τὸ πληρωμα
C	1:17 3:11	τά πάντα καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν Χριστός τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν

In this way, the apostle uses the hymn not only to attract the attention of the audience or out of courtesy (just in case the doxology was authored in the Colossian community). To Paul the hymn becomes an authoritative source, to which he may refer for confirmation.

However, the Christological theme in Colossians is not limited to the quoting of the hymn in 1:15-20. Throughout almost all of the main part of the letter (2:6-3:16), there are references to

<sup>45</sup> This is exactly the effect that takes place with the presence of a formalized “text of increased significance” — that is the hymn (see section 1.2.2). This effect would have been even stronger, if the apostle had used a hymn already known by and accepted in the church of Colossae.

Christ. In the first three (out of five) parts of the exhortation in the main part, the name of Christ (or pronoun that applies to Him) is mentioned almost in every verse,<sup>46</sup> 25 times altogether. The apostle is calling the readers' attention to what happened "in Christ" to those who believe in him. Paul uses Χριστός, Κύριος or αὐτός mostly in the dative case that can be translated as "to Him," "by Him" or — when used with preposition ἐν — "in Him."<sup>47</sup> The prescriptions about the conduct and the relationship within the family are also interpreted in relation to ὁ Κύριος.<sup>48</sup>

We can thus assert that Christ Himself and His work of salvation literally becomes in Colossians the gauge line, by which all the aspects of the Christian life are measured, whether doctrines of the faith, morals, or social relationships.

### **3.2.2 Christology in Colossians: the hymn 1:15-20**

Now we have seen that Paul in the introduction to the body of the letter develops the theme of Christ with an extreme thoroughness, especially in the Christological hymn of the first chapter. Further, the apostle does not deal specifically with the topic of "Christology" as such, instead he appeals back to the hymn. Accordingly, while analyzing the Christology of the whole letter we should first of all turn to the hymn 1:15-20 and its nearest context, i.e. to the introduction of body of the epistle (1:9-23).

#### ***3.2.2.1. The universal significance of the person and the work of Christ***

The person of Christ can be separated from His work with a significant portion of condition. Nevertheless, in order to simplify our analysis, we decided to examine first "person Christology" (who and what Christ is) and then "work Christology" (His work and the result of His activity) as it is presented in Colossian hymn.

##### **i. The Person of Christ**

The status of Christ in the Colossian hymn is extremely high. He is called "the image of God", "the firstborn", "the head of the church", "the beginning", "the firstborn from the dead". Every epithet is called to point out the absolute superiority of Christ, but nevertheless we can classify his superiority into three categories.

The first title of Christ in the hymn is εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου (1:15). The term εἰκὼν means "image, likeness, reflection" (Sobolevskiy 1958:I, 463). The phrase εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ was used in the eastern cults of the deification of the regent and in the Hellenistic Judaism of Wisdom (Lohse 1971:47). Du Plessis finds here an allusion to Gen 1:26, where the likeness of man

<sup>46</sup> 2:6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 20; 3:1, 3, 4, 11, 13, 16.

<sup>47</sup> The phrase ἐν Χριστῷ in different ways can be found in Paul's letters over 150 times (Santala 1995:149), and therefore the frequent usage of these words in Colossians can be considered as another demonstration of its authenticity.

<sup>48</sup> See section 2.1.2.2 and Appendix 2. The topic will be discussed in more details in the section 3.3.



to God is enacted in his lordship over all creation (Du Plessis 1996:216-217). Such an interpretation of the phrase is confirmed by the phrase 1:18b ὅς ἐστιν ἀρχή and is in line with the context of the hymn. The history of the Church has suffered with many debates over the exact meaning of the word εἰκὼν and, consequently, over proper understanding of the status of Christ. Certainly, the meaning of the word has to be interpreted in the context of the whole of New Testament Christology. That is why the most acceptable meaning has to be “the visible embodiment” (Harris 1999:43, Lohse 1971:46), or the “full embodiment” (Du Plessis 1996:216), taking into account the connotation of the lordship.

The term “firstborn” used in regard to Christ in 1:15 should not be understood chronologically. The parallel line 1:18b πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν cannot be interpreted as a chronological priority either, since the Eastern events are not the precedent of resurrection from the dead (1 Kings 17:22, 2 Kings 13:21, John 11). It speaks about the status of Jesus again, His status as of “the first one, the beginning, the guarantee of the future resurrection from the dead” (Du Plessis 1996:215). The meaning of the πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως is explained by the author of the hymn in 1:16 where Christ is presented to us as an immediate participant of the creation.

Verse 1:18 presents Christ to us as ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος τῆς ἐκκλησίας. We shall examine this verse more thoroughly in section 2.2.3. However, we must point out that the superiority of Christ is highlighted here once again — his superiority over the community.

## ii. The Work of Christ

The author of the hymn speaks of Christ not just having an extremely high status, but he also highlights the universal significance of His person and work. This is highlighted by the reiteration of πᾶς and τα πάντα<sup>49</sup> and with the help of the pair of opposites ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς describing the universe, that surrounds the hymn and is expanded in 1:16 to a sizable chiasmus (See Appendix 1).

The incidence of the Son of God (1:13) also can be classified (rather conditionally) into three categories. In the first verses of the hymn (1:15-17) He is presented as an immediate participant in the creation and maintenance of the universe, and such role makes Him related to the image of the personified wisdom of Judaism and with Greek logos (Lohse 1971:52, Barth & Blanke 1992:204-5). Presumably, the apostle realized all of these allusions and used it in order to make himself more understandable to the readers (See Dann 1997:319).

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<sup>49</sup> There are 8 nouns or adjectives with the root πᾶς in five verses of the hymn. Besides, one of the meanings of τὸ πλήρωμα (1:19) is “sum, total amount” (Sobolevsky 1958:II, 1329), and that is why this noun can be a synonym to τὰ πάντα in 1:20 (See Appendix 1).

In the previous section, we mentioned 1:18. Since the superiority of Christ over the Church is indicated by the constitutive nominative predicate, this superiority can be understood both in regard to Christ's person and his work.

The third incidence of Christ (the third in the order of presentation in the hymn but not in importance) is pacification and reconciliation (1:20). It is important to mention that such reconciliation is not just for the few chosen, but for all of creation, ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. Therefore, Christ's act of salvation is understood by the author of the hymn as the act of a universal significance.

### 3.2.2.2 *Christ as the Head of the Church*

Now we are certain that the hymn describes Christ as having a unique status and being involved into the unique activity. According to Dann, this hymn is distinguished by “highlighting the supreme significance of Christ” (Dann 1997:318). The superiority of the Son of God is holistic, universal, cosmic; it begins before the creation of the world. The salvation work of Christ consisting of “pacification” — which means bringing the creation into the original peaceful state — is not less important and universal. However, this is not the end of what the hymn says about Christ in the first chapter of Colossians.

In the section 2.1.1.2 we have described the structure of the hymn. In the Appendix 1 we have shown that there is a chiasmus between the two parallel stanzas and that its centre is the essence of the hymn (1:17-18a).<sup>50</sup> Exactly in this point of the highest tension, the culmination of the hymn we for the first time see the word ἐκκλησία:

<sup>15</sup>ὅς ἐστιν.....  
 πρωτότοκος.....  
<sup>16</sup>ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ.....  
 τὰ πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ.....  
 εἰς αὐτόν.....

<sup>17</sup> καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων  
 καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν,

<sup>18</sup>καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος τῆς ἐκκλησίας·

ὅς ἐστιν.....  
 πρωτότοκος.....  
<sup>19</sup>ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ.....  
<sup>20</sup>καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ.....  
 εἰς αὐτόν.....

<sup>50</sup> “Chiasmus plays a considerable role in Paul: [he uses chiasmus] sometimes for purely rhetorical reasons, but sometimes also due to the course of his argument. Paul also articulates a stated theme... in a chiastic pattern in larger context” (Blass & Debrunner 1961:252 #477/2).



Mentioning the role of Christ as of the head of the Church body is so unexpected that, as we already have said, some researchers question whether the word ἐκκλησία originally belonged to the hymn (see 2.1.1.2.ii). That is exactly why the theme of the church appears in the text not by accident. On the contrary, it is likely that the author uses this contrast meaningfully: Christ who is the Creator, the Almighty and the Redeemer is also is the Head and the Ruler of the Church that is the community of believers.

Throughout the letter, the apostle frequently turns back to the image of the church as of the body of Christ. This image helps Paul to communicate to his readers several thoughts: that ministry to the church is ministry to Christ Himself (1:24), that belonging to the church enables a person to enter into the direct relationship with God (2:19), that the community is an organic unity where every member is interested in the well being of another (3:15).

We can say, that the concept that the “church is the body of Christ” is a very significant aspect of the Christology of Colossians. This almost organic unity between Christ and the gathering of believers in the eyes of Paul carries more ethical than doctrinal significance. Du Plessis has described it in such words:

Christ’s headship over his Church... indicates his lordship over the community, but it expresses particularly his position as the One who unites his Church in himself (Du Plessis 1996:218).

### **3.2.3 Christology of Colossians: ethical interpretation**

Having analyzed the structure of Colossians we have been able to define that the apostle’s main argument is stated in its most essential form in the introduction to the epistle body. The direct quotations from the hymn of the first chapter as well as the numerous references to Christ that we can see in the body of the letter emphasize that Christology is the main argument of Paul.

The hymn in Colossians describes the personality and the work of Christ from two points of view. The main attention of the author of the hymn is on the universal, cosmic importance of Christ, and this theme is developed through out the entire epistle. Nevertheless, the Christology of the hymn and of the entire epistle is not limited to that.

All of a sudden, the author of the hymn inserts an ecclesiological element: “the head of the church” is one of the titles of Christ in the doxology. Despite of the brevity and the sporadic character of this title for Christ, it attracts one’s attention because of its position: it takes the central place in the hymn. This brings us to conclusion that the understanding of the church as of the body of Christ is an important — and probably the most important — idea of the hymn.

We know that one can interpret the phrase αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος τῆς ἐκκλησίας in two ways. From one point, it can be understood as the superior position of Christ in

the life of the Church, and in this sense, it is the indication of the universal superiority of Christ in the particular church case. But if this is the case, the use of *το σῶμα* is unnecessary. For that reason we think that another interpretation of this metaphor is more acceptable and confirmed by the context of Colossians. From our point of view, the accent should be placed not upon the Christ as the Head, but upon the church as the body, because this metaphor will be used by the author further in the epistle (see 1:24, 2:19, 3:9-11, 15).

Du Plessis says that the concept of the church as the body of Christ is very close in proximity to the formula: “in Christ”, so widely used by Paul (Du Plessis 1996:212-3, 218). Truly, the identification of a believer with Christ takes place at the moment of baptism (2:11-12) but through this act the believer becomes a member of the congregation. The theme of baptism can be seen in the Minor hymn (1:12-14)<sup>51</sup> and in the verses 1:21-23 surrounding the Hymn 1:15-20. Thus, the sermon-prayer — that is the introduction to the body of the letter — is concentrated not only on the universal lordship of Christ; it concentrated on the meaning of the community as the body of Christ. In such a way, the status of the church, of the congregation becomes very high: to Paul, there is no salvation outside of Christ, but it is the church that is the visible, earthly (and the only available for a human being) custodian and the communicator of the gospel, the message about Christ.<sup>52</sup> The Church as the body of Christ is His visible earthly incarnation. That is why through baptism the believer not only enters “Christ”, but also enters the congregation. The consequence of such an understanding of the church is that ethics are understood primarily as a ministry to Christ Himself.

So, in the introduction, Paul outlines the main argument of his exhortation. This argument is the declaration of the universal superiority of Christ and declaration of the church being the body of Christ. In the next section of our research, we shall demonstrate how Paul uses his “ecclesiastical Christology” in order to help the Colossians stand against false teaching and solve their emerging ethical problems.

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<sup>51</sup> See section 2.1.1.2.i.

<sup>52</sup> Even Paul himself, who had had his own mystical experience and had learned about Christ from Christ Himself, immediately joined the church (Acts 9:1-19). That is why even in this exception the principle of the church being the communicator of salvation was proved even more.



### **3.3 Paul's solution: ethical interpretation of Christology**

#### **3.3.1 Ethical exhortation as the leitmotif of the epistle**

The analysis of Colossians brought us to the conclusion that Paul understood his own ministry to Christ as being his ministry to His Church. Thus, he in a way takes off the mystical aura of “an apostle” and declares that it is his exhortation and comforting of believers that is his true ministry to God. We can say that starting with the explanation of the purposes of his ministry Paul interprets ministry to God in ethical terms.

Truly, having mentioned his “suffering for the Church, the Body of Christ” (1:24), Paul develops the theme by speaking about the feat that he is accomplishing for the sake of the readers and “for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh” (2:1). It is important to notice that the apostle ministers for the sake of people, not Christ. The idea of the ministry to God as a ministry to the church, as meeting particular human needs gets developed later in the main section of the Body of the letter.

As we have determined, the Main Section of the Body of the letter consists of five blocks, each of them begins with the particle *οὖν*.<sup>53</sup> The first two blocks (2:6-15, 16-23) contain warnings about the dangers of false teachings. The apostle stands against attempts to find other ways of salvation than faith and baptism (joining the congregation) and calls his readers to stay away from those espousing esoteric visions on the one hand and traditionalism on the other. Having identified oneself with Christ in baptism, a man has done everything that necessary and sufficient for salvation (2:11-15). Doubting that baptism is sufficient for salvation is the same as doubting that the work of Christ is sufficient for salvation, doubting in His divine nature (2:9-11). Through baptism a person becomes a member of the community — the body of Christ — and therefore denying the doctrine, which is taught in the congregation means denying Christ (2:19). Being confident that Christ is completely, universally superior, Paul claims any attempt to add to salvation something outside of Christ and His Church an empty temptation, that has an appearance of wisdom but is not (2:8, 23).

In the central chiastic<sup>54</sup> block (3:1-5) Paul is calling his readers to seek the things which are above, to set their affection on the things which are above, appealing to baptism and the new life “in Christ.” The last two blocks explain what life “in Christ” is like. It is interesting to notice that the actions characterizing this life are of ethical character. There is no trace of formalism, no abstract concepts, no mystery. To “put on the new human being” means to put on love, mercy and goodness (3:10, 12).

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<sup>53</sup> See section 2.2.3.

<sup>54</sup> See section 2.2.3.2.

Therefore, in the main part of the body of the letter the apostle again points out to his readers that the only reliable demonstration of the genuineness of their faith and salvation is their ethical conduct. But it is not until the closing of the body of the letter that this theme becomes the focus, climaxing in the Household code.

### **3.3.2. The conclusion of Paul's exhortation: Household code**

#### ***3.3.2.1 The functions of the body conclusion***

In the previous sections of our research, we have said that the conclusion, as well as the introduction, is the key element of speech. Truly, it is the last impression that remains longer in one's memory, and that is why it is especially important that at the end of his speech, the orator should briefly and clearly repeats its main ideas. As for the NT epistles that were read out loud in the churches, the body closing becomes especially important: the impression of what had been previously heard could not be dimmed by the epistolary closing<sup>55</sup> — even though it contains information that has no relation to the main theme of the letter. Letter to Colossians is an example of resolution to this problem.

As we have mentioned, the closing of the epistle body in Colossians consists of two fragments: the Household code (3:17-4:1) and the Final admonition (4:2-6). We have also mentioned that the fragment 4:2-6 by its structure better suits the epistolary closing<sup>56</sup> and that we defined it as a part of the epistle Body due to the fact that the general exhortation it contains, correspond to the main part of the epistle. For these reasons the Household code takes upon itself the function of the conclusion.

The ancients said that in the conclusion of a speech it is important to not simply “thrill” the listener, but also to “summarize” what has been said (Aristotle, *Rh.* III, 1419b/30). In other words, the main ideas of the orator must be presented in the Closing. That is why the analysis of the body conclusion of the epistle will help us to see most clear the main ideas of the entire epistle.

#### ***3.3.2.2 Main ideas of the Household code (3:17-4:1)***

Even a brief look at the text of the Household code (3:17-4:1, see the Appendix 2) shows that it contains much more than a listing of the obligations of each member of the *oikos*. The author gives more attention to the foundation of the suggested relationship and to the general exhortations that apply to everybody (3:17, 23-25). Moreover, the comments that follow each of the “individual” prescriptions (18b, 19b, 20b, 21b, 22b) are universal by the character: the call to do “what is pleasing to God”, “not to provoke the neighbor's anger”, “not to be bitter”, not to become a

<sup>55</sup> Epistolary Closing is found in every NT letter (see section 1.3).

<sup>56</sup> See section 2.2.3.3.



hypocrite by fulfilling one's obligations in front of other people — all of it can be applied to every Christian with no regard to his social status. For that reason, we think that the purpose of the Household code in Colossians lies not in a consecutive listing of responsibilities, but in the demonstration of the *principle* of the congregation members' interrelationship in Christ by the example of the relationship within the *oikos*.<sup>57</sup>

So how can we define the principle that the author of Colossians is calling us to obey? In order to answer this question we must analyze the text of the Household code in the epistle.

In the section 2.1.2.2 we described the structure of the Household code. We have demonstrated that the exhortation of the *oikos* members is framed by the repetition of a three syntactical elements:

<sup>17</sup>καὶ πᾶν ὃ τι ἐὰν ποιῆτε .....  
ἐν ὀνόματι κυρίου Ἰησοῦ,  
εὐχαριστοῦντες.....

<sup>18-22</sup>(exhortation of the *oikos* members)

<sup>23</sup>ὁ ἐὰν ποιῆτε,  
ἐκ ψυχῆς ἐργάζεσθε ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ .....  
<sup>24</sup>εἰδότες....

The first line of the parallel points out the comprehensiveness of the exhortation — this fact once again confirms our interpretation of the social, as opposed to familial, character of the apostle's teaching. The second line contains the name of the Lord, which we defined as a the leitmotif of the epistle. In the third line of the parallel we see the participles — each of them introducing the new fragment of the household code. In the first case it is the exhortation to the *oikos*<sup>58</sup> members itself, in the second — it is a coda that completes the household code. We can say that the scope of the household code (3:17 and 23) highlight the theme already presented in the epistle — the theme of the universal significance of Christ.

The Coda (3:24-25) is an integral part of the household code, because it is a subordinate clause introduced by the participle εἰδότες. With the help of chiasmus built on phonetic assonance, a new theme is highlighted in the coda, which had not been previously discussed in the Main

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<sup>57</sup> The statement that the family is the basic unit of the society is quite well known. As a corollary of this thought, we can say that the family is also a model of society (see Tidball 1983:79). Truly, in the patriarchal society with its strict authoritarian system, the relationship within the family is strictly prescribed — and all the power is concentrated in the hands of the *pater familias*. In democratic society (modern western society), the family relationship is based on the principle of equal partnership. Therefore, the household code stipulates not only the family relationship in particular, but the social relationship in general.

Section of the epistle,<sup>59</sup> the theme of divine recompense. Paul himself explains the inevitability of the recompense: τῷ κυρίῳ Χριστῷ δουλεύετε. For this reason, we think that the idea of recompense is subject to the theme of ministering to Christ — the theme that can be traced in the household code and in the entire epistle.

As we have said, verse 4:1 is not the part of the *oikos* members' exhortation 3:18-22. Probably Paul just added it to the existing household code.<sup>60</sup> However, this fact does not depreciate — on the contrary, it increases the value of the verse: the authorship for 4:1 with no doubts belongs to Paul himself and therefore this verse indicates the apostle's own understanding of relationship. The exhortation of the masters (accidentally or meaningfully) is located in the closing of the household code. In addition, the basis of the apostle's advice to masters is introduced by the same participle as was used in the coda (εἰδότες). Therefore, 4:1 gives the summary of the exhortation in the words: εἰδότες ὅτι καὶ ὑμεῖς ἔχετε κύριον ἐν οὐρανῷ, which can be understood as the clarification of 1:25. These words can be applied to every member of the *oikos*, regardless of one's social status, gender or age.

The main idea of the household code in Colossians may be expressed in the following words: each aspect of human life is within incidence of God, and it means that the relationship with the neighbors should be in line with one's faith in Christ.

### 3.3.2.3. *The Household code in the text of the epistle*

Thus, in the conclusion of the epistle, Paul's task was to state once again the core ideas of his exhortation concisely and in the most clear and expressive manner possible. We are convinced that use of the household code by Paul in the text of the epistle was dictated not necessitated by rhetoric alone. The fact that after his general exhortation the apostle turns personally to each of the readers seems to be more crucial.

One of the most significant differences of the NT household codes from the similar ancient documents consists of the fact that the NT writers appeal to all members of *oikos* instead of the *pater familias* (see Jeffers 1999:86). Appealing to the wives, children and slaves Paul proves the personal value and thus the personal responsibility of each person for what he does, regardless of one's social status. If on the one hand in 3:11, the apostle speaks of the equality in Christ of all

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<sup>58</sup> In the strict sense, the verses 3:18-22 are not the subordinate clause as, for example, verse 24b-25a. Nevertheless, participle εὐχαριστοῦντε "introduces" the following four verses. As we have pointed in the section 2.1.1.2, Paul used this participle to begin the fragment instead of completing it.

<sup>59</sup> It may seem that the theme of recompense has been discussed in the epistle already, but it is not so. In 1:5 Paul mentions the hope that awaits in heaven but it is not clear what exactly he means - the reward for the ministry or the "heritage of the saints" — evidently undeserved. In 1:23 the apostle gives a warning about the danger of falling away but he doesn't mention the recompense at all.

<sup>60</sup> See section 2.1.2.2.



people despite the differences of their ethnic and religious background, Paul uses the Household code on the other hand, with its variety of responsibilities, to keep this equality from turning into the leveling of the differences.

Therefore, in the end of his epistle Paul gives the examples, which demonstrate how his exhortation should be applied in life. However, over and over again the apostle emphasizes that all those examples are subject to one principle: every believer is a servant of God and he must fulfill his responsibilities as if he or she were serving God Himself. This is the point where Christology and ethics of Paul meet.

### **3.3.3 The epistle to the Colossians: from the preaching of Christ to the ethical exhortation**

As we traced the development of Paul's reasoning throughout the entire epistle, we were able to establish that the apostle begins his exhortations with the thesis of Christ's greatness and completes it with ethical appeals. At first glance, the logic of such a sequence does not seem clear, but all things fall into their places after the thorough investigation of the apostle's argumentation.

Right after the epistolary opening, Paul begins his exhortation with the prayer-sermon (1:9-23). The apostle gets the attention of the readers concentrated on the fact that Christ has the power over the entire universe. This is where for the first time he says that Christ is the head of the Church (1:18). These two principles — "Christ is all in all" and "the Church is the body of Christ" — have very clear practical meaning in the eyes of Paul. He turns to these principles repeatedly in order to emphasize to his readers the certainty of their salvation, the members of the Church, and to emphasize that ministry to God is demonstrated in ministry to others. Having believed in Christ and having been baptized in His name, the believer becomes a part of His body (2:6-15). When worshiping God is limited to formal rituals, it causes animosity among the believers (2:14-16) and leads away from the true ministry (2:18-23). Thinking about the things, which are above and being transformed into the body of Christ is demonstrated not by passive meditation but in the elimination of the moral vices (3:1-9) and the active serving of one's neighbor (2:12-16). If the Church is the body of Christ, that means that one's ministry to the members of this body is ministry to Christ. If the power of Christ is universal, then one can see the work of God in this world order and that one's active participation in society is a participation in the work of God. That is why Paul says, "whatsoever you do... do it knowing that you serve the Lord."

Conflicts are inevitable in any society. The potential for conflict in the Colossian congregation was especially high because of the different ethnical backgrounds and social status of its members. Moreover, their past religious experience was hindering them from understanding the ethical teachings of Christ. For this particular reason Paul unfolds his argumentation so

sequentially: he begins with the indisputable — with the headship of Christ over the whole world; he continues with the declaration of the organic unity of Christ and the Church, and ends up with the statement that ministry to Christ is primarily demonstrated by ministry to people. Therefore, Paul averts all attempts to turn faith in Christ into some abstract theorizing, and motivates the believers to develop the character of Christ in them, which is demonstrated in the love for the neighbor.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

This chapter was dedicated to the analysis of the rhetorical analysis of Colossians. Using our interpretation of the epistle's composition, we have tried to define what purposes the author was pursuing in this epistle and what tools he used in order to reach his goal.

First, we determined what were the purposes of the epistle as Paul defined them and what was the rhetorical situation, in response to which the epistle was written. We have seen that Paul was trying to exhort his readers in such a way that would help them find comfort and hope, but also to be perfected into the likeness of Christ. We have also stated that Paul addressed this epistle to a number of other churches in the region of Laodicea. The heterogeneity of these churches was their main characteristic. These Christian communities consisted of people of various ethnical background and social status. At the time when the epistle was written, the situation in the Colossian church, which Paul primarily addresses, was experiencing great success, and yet Paul could detect a few warning signals emerging out of their circumstance. Apparently, there were people trying to convince the believers that their salvation cannot be complete without fulfilling the Law of Moses. It also seems that somebody was trying to introduce the elements of the heathen mystical cults into the practices of the Christian community. Then, the social climate around the developing young church was not beneficial for strengthening the love and unity among the believers. Therefore, Paul had to write a message that would reach several goals: (1) To clarify the understanding of the fullness of salvation; (2) to declare the supremacy of Christ as the only Saviour; (3) To call the readers to the practical demonstration of their faith in the acts of love. The next part of this chapter was dedicated to the investigation of how the apostle was reaching his goals.

According to the ancient rhetorical works, the core thesis on which the further reasoning of the author is built has to appear in the introduction. In our case, this key thesis should be expected in the body introduction — in the Christological hymn of the first chapter. The hymn declares the lordship of Christ over creation and His universal might. The role of Christ as the head and the uniting basis of the Church is also highlighted in the hymn. We have seen that throughout the entire



epistle Paul often refers back to the hymn. For instance, he refers to the universal lordship of Christ when he states that it is sufficient for salvation to be identified with Christ through the baptism. We have also mentioned that the theme of unity among the believers and the supreme significance of the congregation for the spiritual life of every believer are developed by the apostle with great thoroughness. Therefore, the idea of identifying with Christ, of being "in Christ" takes on ethical meaning.

To what conclusion does Paul come at the end of his argumentation? What are the particular actions that he calls his readers to perform? We have seen that in the second part of the epistle body, great attention is paid to the ethical implications of faith in Christ. The rhetorical organization of the epistle has confirmed our assumption that the interrelation between a person's faith and everyday conduct is very important to Paul. An analysis of the *Haustafel* construct and its meaning in light of the text of the epistle demonstrated that, in the eyes of Paul, the natural consequence of belonging to the mystical body of Christ is the transformation of interpersonal, ethical conduct.

Therefore, Paul's response to the dual dangers of the Christian faith being reduced to ritual or fetish and the potential separation of believers was by appealing to the community members to comprehend their inseparable connection to Christ and to each other.

## Conclusion

To investigate in this work the theme, “The ethical meaning of the Christology in Colossians: Perspectives from a rhetorical analysis,” we have laid out the series of tasks: (1) To analyze the Epistle to the Colossians as a subject of rhetorical work; (2) to identify the composition of the epistle; (3) to trace the development of Paul’s thought through the whole epistle; (4) to identify the interrelation between Christology and ethics in Paul’s argumentation in Colossians. In our opinion, this approach provides the most complex and coherent analysis of the epistle and, on the base of facts, demonstrates for Paul that ethics (i.e. social orientated behavior) is the expressed and unavoidable corollary to faith in Christ.

The First chapter of our research has a methodological character. We have considered genre and composition peculiarities of the NT epistles and have identified the meaning of these peculiarities for an understanding of the epistles. The NT epistles belong to the open type of letters (i.e. the real letters), which have been assigned primordially to publishing; the goal of these letters being to change the attitudes and behaviour of their receivers. The peculiarities of the origin and the destination of the NT epistles determine their rhetoric: the epistles are influenced by Greco-Roman oratorical art; their connection to oral tradition of the Early Church is expressed by the use of literary form. The analysis as to the nature of the NT epistles led us to the conclusion that the composition of the letter’s text allows to identify the argument and the reasoning developed by the author. The epistles have been acknowledged as possessing vital meaning and importance for the life of the Church. These epistles are the comprehensive argumentation, with premise, thesis and conclusion. Hence, for clarification of the point of the letter it is necessary to analyze its outline and to identify the function of each of its sections. In such a way, the presence of epistolary opening and closing is stipulated by the circumstances of the NT epistle’s origin. The composition of the body of the epistle takes upon itself the conventionality of oral speech, as its introduction and conclusion have rhetorical importance, while its main part contains the presentation and development of the epistle’s thesis.

The Second chapter of our investigation can be designated as “technical.” It has been dedicated to define the composition of Colossians. First of all, we have noticed the presence of the Christological hymn and the Household code. The use of these literary forms is an indicator of the importance concerning the discussed themes: Christology and ethics. Having analyzed the composition of Colossians we have seen that the body of the epistle is framed by epistolary opening and closing sections and contains a body introduction, body and body conclusion. The borders of



each section are reflected in the structure of the text. We have also seen that the rhetorical methods used in the epistle reproduce the dynamic of Paul's argumentation: the brightest passages of the text are the hymn and the Household Code, which coincide with the body introduction and conclusion, i.e. with a premise and deduction to the argument.

In the Third chapter we have accumulated all the work material, in order to clarify the conception of the epistle to Colossians. Paul, himself, understood the purpose of the epistle as an admonition and consolation to the believers. He wanted each of his readers to become similar to Christ in his love. However, the living conditions of Paul's readers did not promote love in the community. Therefore, it became necessary for Paul to demonstrate the fact that the main subject of faith — the divine nature and saving work of Christ — finds its only correct continuation in the commandment of love and unity. Paul begins his admonition from a prayer-sermon, which is telling about the divine greatness of Christ, and he ends with an ethical appeal. Hence, the hymn is the premise of the apostle's argument and the Household Code is its result. The whole composition of the epistle submits to the scheme of 'Christology-ethics'. In the Christological hymn Christ is represented as the Lord of the Universe and as a head of the Church Body. These attributes of Christ allow for the unity of different people in one Church, one Body of the Lord. Therefore, the Household Code of Colossians delineates the differences as to the mutual duties of husbands and wives, fathers and children, masters and slaves. All are the members of one church, and each is in service to the Lord, "in the Lord" and "for the Lord". So, the belonging of a believer to the mystical Body of Christ should be expressed by a quite real and personal relationship. In balancing the mystical by the ethical and the ethical by the mystical, Paul avoids two dangers at once:

The great danger for all mysticism is that of becoming supra-ethical.... [On the other hand] The great weakness of the utilitarian ethic is at all times that it can relate itself only to man's action and not to that which he undergoes, although for his full development both must be taken into account (Schweitzer 1931:297, 302).

So then, the rhetorical analysis of the epistle to Colossians allows us to see that, for Paul, faith in Christ is the base for behaviour orientated to the needs of a neighbor. Therefore, Christian faith does not become an abstract philosophy, a ritualized cult, or materialistic social teaching. In Colossians, the Christian faith — likening to Christ — is presented as a synergy, as teamwork between God and a human being. Paul believes in the almighty and universal supremacy of Christ, but he does not relieve human responsibility for one's own physical and spiritual well being and, also, for the well being of his or her neighbors.

The ethical emphasis, as the most important aspect of the Christian life, is very topical for the contemporary church and society. We have only established the fact for an ethical interpretation

of Christology in the Epistle to Colossians. We believe that this theme demands a continuation: serious and coherent analysis of each of the NT books will move us to recognize and comprehend, theologically, the practical meaning of the dogmas.



## Appendix # 1

## The structure of the fragment Col 1:12-20

## The Little Hymn:

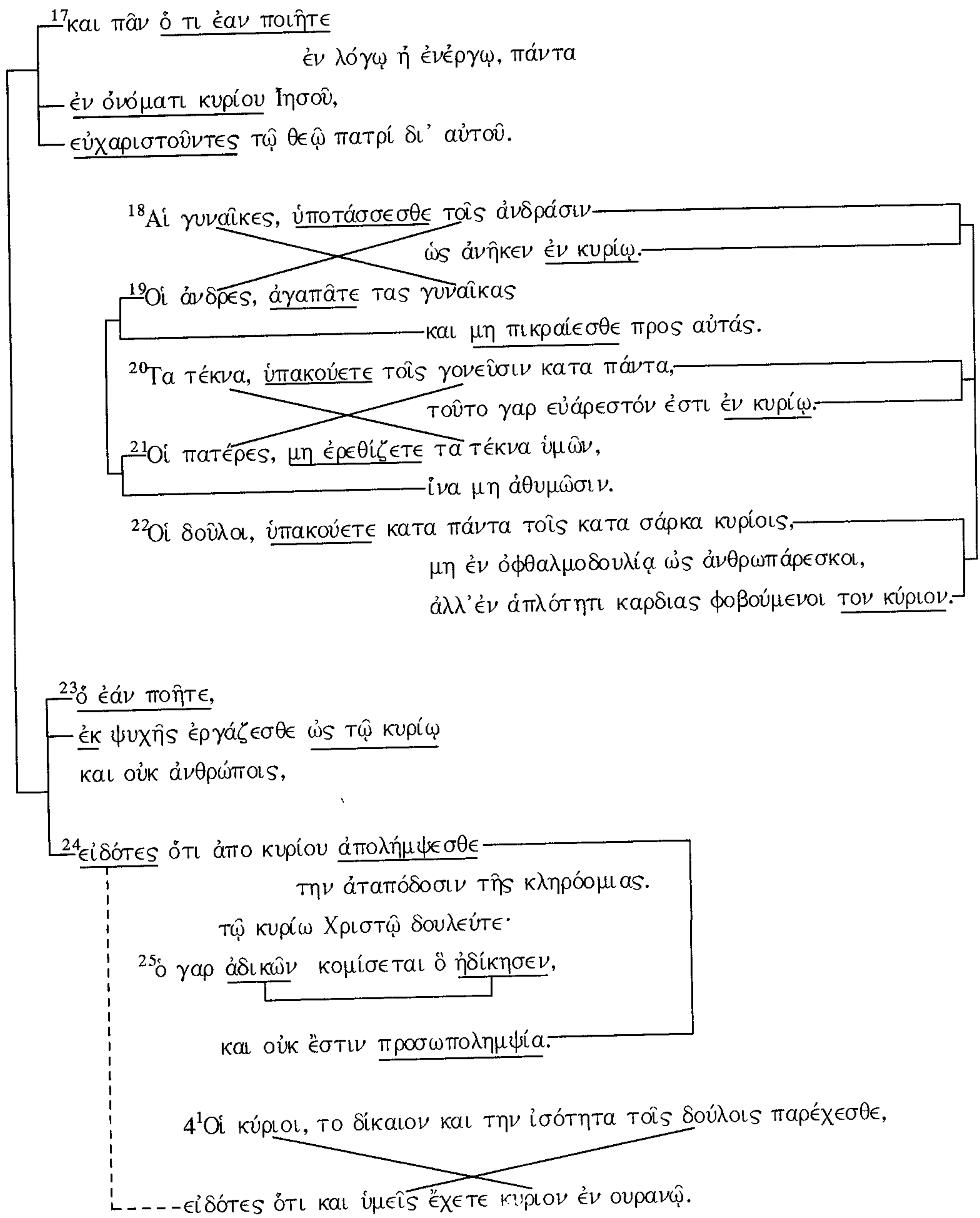
μετὰ χαρᾶς <sup>12</sup>εὐχαριστοῦντες τῷ πατρὶ  
 τῷ ἱκανώσαντι ὑμᾶς <sup>13</sup>ὡς ἔρρύσατο ἡμᾶς <sup>14</sup>ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν,  
 μετέστησεν <sup>15</sup>εἰς τὴν μερίδα τοῦ κλήρου τῶν ἁγίων ἐν τῷ φωτί·  
 ἐκ τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ σκότους καὶ  
 εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ υἱοῦ τῆς ἀγάπης αὐτοῦ,  
 τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν·

## The Hymn:

<sup>15v</sup>ὡς ἐστὶν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου,  
 πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως,  
<sup>16</sup>ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα  
 ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ  
 ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς,  
 τὰ ὄρατα καὶ  
 τὰ ἀόρατα,  
 εἴτε θρόνοι  
 εἴτε κυριότητες  
 εἴτε ἀρχαὶ  
 εἴτε ἐξουσίαι·  
 τὰ πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ καὶ  
 εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται·  
<sup>17</sup>καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων  
 καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν,  
<sup>18</sup>καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος τῆς ἐκκλησίας·  
 ὃς ἐστὶν ἀρχή,  
 πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν,  
 ἵνα γένηται ἐν πᾶσιν αὐτὸς πρωτεύων,  
<sup>19</sup>ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ εὐδόκησεν πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι  
<sup>20</sup>καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ ἀποκαταλλάξαι τὰ πάντα  
 εἰς αὐτόν,  
 εἰρηνοποιήσας διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ, [δι' αὐτοῦ]  
 εἴτε τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς  
 εἴτε τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς·

## Appendix # 2

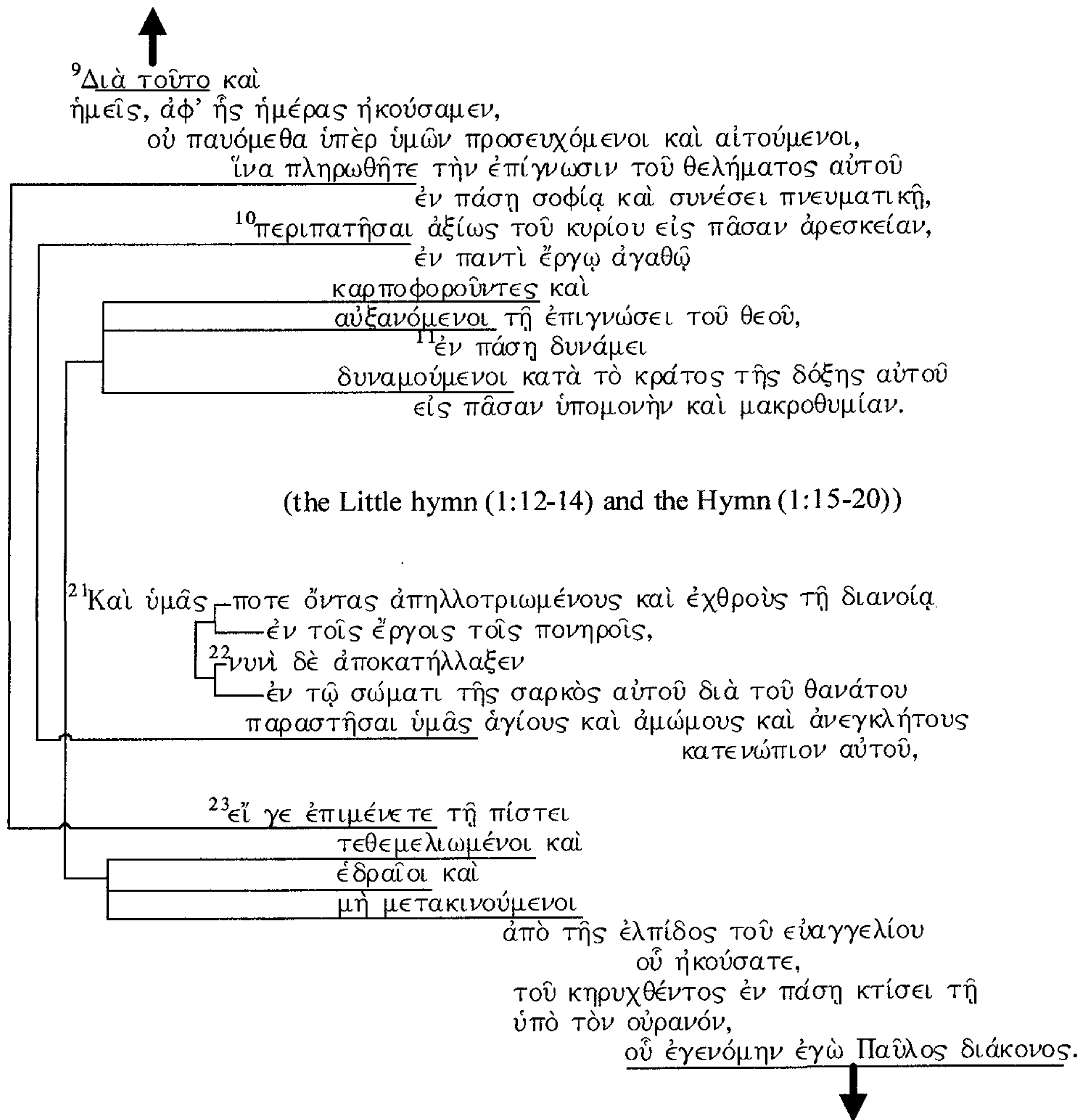
## The structure of the Household code (Col 3:17-4:1)





## Appendix # 3

## The structure of the introduction to the body of the epistle (Col 1:9-23)



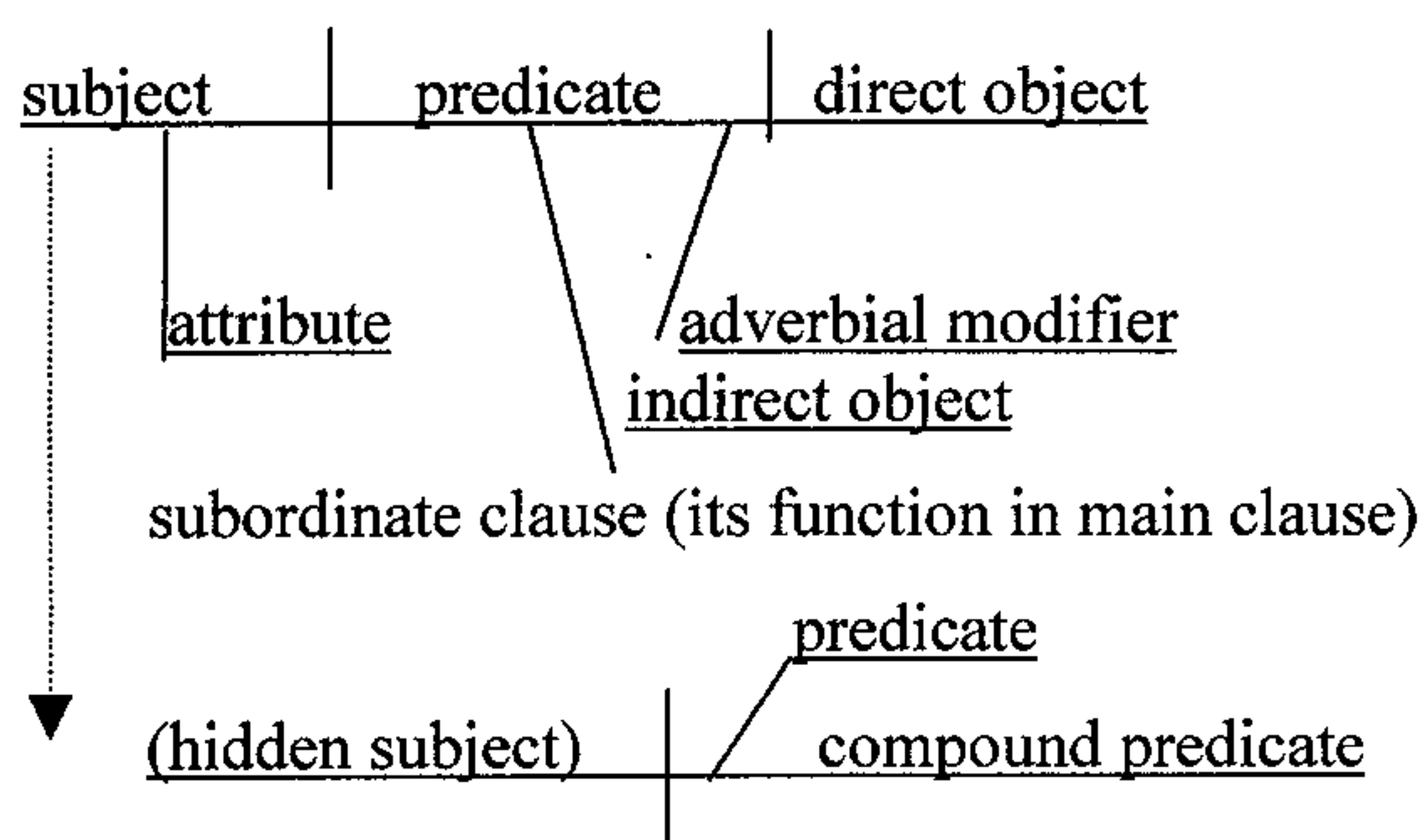




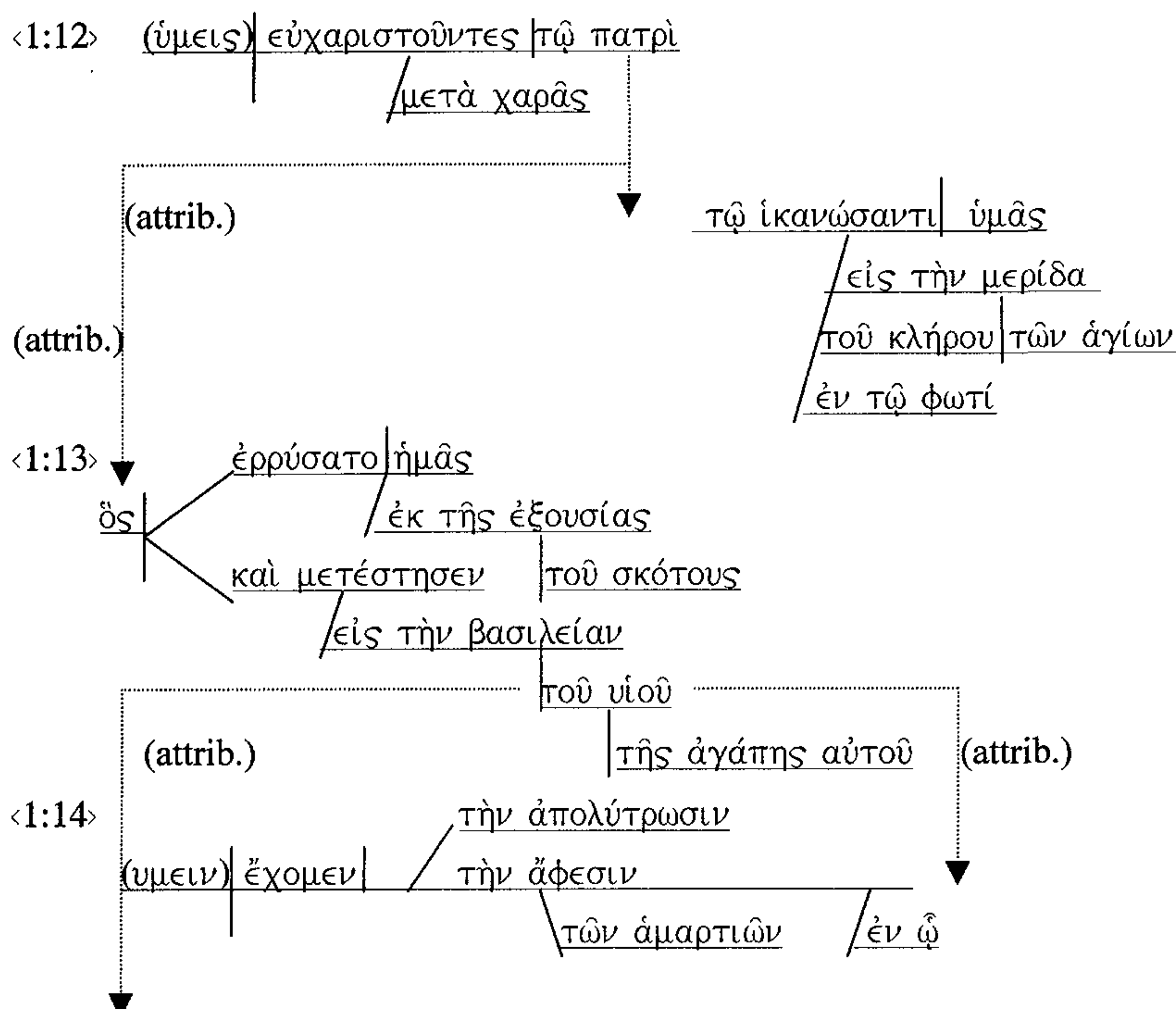
## Appendix # 5

## The Scheme of the syntactic relations in Col 1:12-20

## Conventions:



## The fragment 1:12-20:



<1:15> ὅς ἐστιν+ 
}

 εἰκὼν  
 πρωτότοκος  
 πάσης κτίσεως
 
 τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου

<1:16> ὅτι

τὰ πάντα 
}

 τὰ ὀρατὰ  
 καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα  
 εἴτε θρόνοι  
 εἴτε κυριότητες  
 εἴτε ἄρχαι  
 εἴτε ἐξουσίαι
 
 τὰ πάντα 
}

 ἐκτίσθη  
 ἐκτίσται  
 ἐν αὐτῷ  
 δι' αὐτοῦ  
 καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν
 
  
 ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς  
 καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς

<1:17> καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν

καὶ τὰ πάντα 
}

 πρὸ πάντων  
 συνέστηκεν  
 ἐν αὐτῷ

<1:18> καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν + ἡ κεφαλὴ

}

 τοῦ σώματος  
 τῆς ἐκκλησίας
 
  
 (attrib.)

ὅς ἐστιν+ 
}

 ἀρχή  
 πρωτότοκος  
 ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν
 
  
 ἵνα (adv. modif. of goal)

αὐτὸς 
}

 γένηται + πρωτεύων  
 ἐν πᾶσιν

<1:19> ὅτι ▼

<1:20> καὶ 
}

 πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα  
 εὐδόκησεν + κατοικήσαι  
 ἐν αὐτῷ  
 ἀποκαταλλάξαι  
 δι' αὐτοῦ  
 εἰς αὐτόν  
 εἴτε τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς  
 εἴτε τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς  
 εἰρηνοποιήσας  
 διὰ τοῦ αἵματος  
 [δι' αὐτοῦ] τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ



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