

Colossian Problem Part 3: The Colossian Heresy

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A Human Tradition

By “the Colossian heresy” is meant the “philosophy and empty deceit” against which the Colossian Christians are put on their guard in Colossians 2:8. Did this “philosophy and empty deceit” denote some specific form of false teaching which was finding acceptance at Colossae? Or was the church there being warned against certain ideas which were “in the air” at the time and which its members might conceivably find attractive if ever they were exposed to them?

Perhaps one need not ask these questions if Morna Hooker, in whose eyes not even the most “assured” result of biblical study is sacrosanct, had not ventilated it 10 years ago in a paper entitled “Were There False Teachers in Colossae?” She did not return a dogmatic “no” to her own question, but suggested that the data could be accounted for if Paul was guarding his readers against the pressures of contemporary society with its prevalent superstitions, more or less as a preacher today might feel it necessary to remind his congregation that Christ is greater than any astrological forces.¹ Paul’s language, however, points to a rather specific line of teaching against which his readers are warned, and the most natural reason for warning those readers against it would be that they were liable to be persuaded by it. So to Hooker’s question this writer is disposed to give the answer, “Yes, there were false teachers in Colossae.”

BSac 141:563 (Jul 84) p. 196

The only source of information about their false teaching is the Epistle to the Colossians itself. Paul does not give a detailed account of it, because his readers were presumably familiar with it already; he contented himself with pointing out some of its defects and assessing its character in the light of the gospel.

Some scholars suggest that Paul’s polemic was not always well informed, that he was prone to misunderstand the positions he attacked. The implication is that those modern scholars who charge him with misunderstanding are better informed than he was about this or that position which he attacks, whether it be the Corinthian disbelief in future resurrection or the Galatian reliance on works of a certain kind as the ground of their justification.² On this it can simply be said that even those scholars are dependent on what Paul says about the controverted positions. So if he was misinformed, no more trustworthy source of information is available. So far as the Colossian heresy is concerned, it may be assumed that Epaphras (or whoever Paul’s informant was) brought an accurate account of it, and that Paul himself was well enough acquainted with current trends of thought to grasp its essential character.

This “philosophy and empty deceit,” then, is said by Paul to follow “the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ” (Col 2:8). The Colossian Christians, it seems, had at one time been subject to those “elemental forces,” those στοιχεῖα, but through union with Christ by faith they had “died” in relation to those forces and so were no longer bound to obey them (Col 2:20). The “elemental forces” play much the same part here as they do in the argument of Galatians 4:3, 9, where Christians (whether Jewish or Gentile by birth) who submit to circumcision and similar requirements of the Jewish Law are described as reverting to slavery under the “elemental forces.” So, according to

Paul's present argument with the Colossians, submission to the prohibitions "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!" (Col 2:21) involves re-entry into the state of bondage from which believers in Christ have been delivered by Him.

The context makes it clear that these prohibitions refer to things that are ethically neutral, not to things that are inherently sinful. Food, according to Paul, is ethically neutral,³ and "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!" is a vivid way of denoting various kinds of food restrictions. Voluntary self-denial in matters of food can be a helpful spiritual exercise, and may on

BSac 141:563 (Jul 84) p. 197

occasion be recommended by considerations of Christian charity; but what is deprecated here is a form of asceticism for asceticism's sake, cultivated as religious obligation. Its association with angel worship (Col 2:18)—whether that means worship offered *to* angels or *by* angels—and with "would-be religion" (Col 2:23), if that is what ἐθελοθρησκεία means, might provide further help in the identification of its nature and purpose.

But the chief help is probably provided by the reference to "festival or new moon or a Sabbath day" (Col 2:16). Festivals and new moons were observed by non-Jews as well as Jews, but Sabbaths were distinctively Jewish. As the Galatians' observance of "days and months and seasons and years" was a sign of their renewed and untimely subjection to the elemental forces which they had served before their conversion (Gal 4:9–10), the same could be said of their fellow-Christians in Colossae (or anywhere else) if they allowed themselves to be dictated to in matters like a "festival or new moon or a Sabbath day."

Another Jewish reference might be recognized in Colossians 2:11, where the inward purification symbolized by Christian baptism is called "a circumcision made without hands"—probably in deliberate contrast to Jewish circumcision.

Possible Affinities

When an attempt is made by means of such indications to reconstruct the outlines of the Colossian heresy, one is prompted to ask if the reconstruction bears any resemblance to systems of thought of which something is known.

Calvin showed the acuteness of his well-informed mind in identifying the false teachers as Jews—but Jews of a speculative tendency, who "invented an access to God through the angels, and put forth many speculations of that nature, such as are contained in the books of Dionysius on the Celestial Hierarchy, drawn from the school of the Platonists." By Platonists he meant what are today called Neoplatonists, although Pseudo-Dionysius developed his thought along lines which set him apart from the general run of Neoplatonists as much as of Platonists.⁴ His "celestial hierarchy" comprised nine orders of angels, by whose mediation God ordained that human beings should be raised to closer communion with Himself.⁵ Pseudo-Dionysius' presentation of this scheme reflects a much later outlook than that of the first century, but the idea of a gradation of intermediaries which he

BSac 141:563 (Jul 84) p. 198

elaborated certainly seems to have been present in the Colossian heresy.

In more recent times scholars have tended to see Pythagorean rather than Platonic influence here. In 1970 Eduard Schweizer found analogies to the Colossian heresy in a Neopythagorean document of the first century B.C., in which he recognized the concentration of all the themes of the heresy with the exception of Sabbath observance. Sabbath observance in Colossae suggested to him that it was a Jewish brand of Neopythagoreanism in which a central place was given to the purification of the soul from everything earthly and to its ascent to the upper ether, the dwelling-place of Christ.⁶ One of the themes of the Neopythagorean text, sexual abstinence, is not explicitly included among the data of Colossians, but one would expect it to be understood along with the other forms of asceticism indicated.)

Others have sought to see the origin of the heresy in the Iranian redemption myth, the outlines of which were reconstructed by Reitzenstein in 1921.⁷ In his *Iranische Erlösungsmysterium* Reitzenstein indeed cited various passages in Colossians to illustrate his reconstruction, but with the passage of years it has become increasingly evident that the *Erlösungsmysterium* was more his invention than his reconstruction.

In a careful study published as long ago as 1917, but first accessible in an English translation in 1975, Dibelius traced detailed resemblances to the Colossian heresy in the record of initiation into the Isis mysteries preserved in the *Metamorphoses* of the second-century Latin writer Apuleius of Madaura.⁸ He did not conclude, of course, that it was initiation into the Isis mysteries that was attracting the Colossian Christians, but he did bring out a number of interesting analogies. What these analogies amount to is simply this: no matter into what mystic cult or secret society people were initiated, there was a generic likeness between the various initiatory actions or terminology.

But did initiation, in this sense of the word, play a part in the Colossian heresy? One phrase in particular has been thought to show that it did. That is found in Colossians 2:18, where Paul described someone who professes an advanced degree of spirituality as “taking his stand on visions” or as trusting in “the things which he has seen at his initiation”—however ἃ ἐώρακεν ἐμβατεύων is to be translated. At one time this phrase was thought to be so difficult that conjectural emendations were

BSac 141:563 (Jul 84) p. 199

favored; but in 1912 and 1913 Dibelius and Sir William Ramsay, almost simultaneously, concluded that the verb ἐμβατεύω here bore a sense which it had been discovered to bear in inscriptions from the temple of Apollo at Claros, a few miles northwest of Ephesus.⁹ In these inscriptions it apparently signifies not the initiation itself but the next stage, the initiate’s entrance into the sacred area in order to see the mysteries, which, however, could well be described in more general terms as “the things which he has seen at his initiation.”¹⁰ The readers would readily catch the suggestion that the person alluded to had formally entered on his higher experience like someone being admitted to secret rites (from which the uninitiated were excluded) and was now appealing to that superior enlightenment in support of his teaching.

Gnostic and Essene Traces

Some of the Gnostic movements of the second century involved a kind of initiation (the Naassenes, e.g.¹¹) and it is easy to categorize the Colossian heresy as a first-century form of “incipient Gnosticism.” It is not so easy, however, to relate it to any of the particular forms of developed Gnosticism known today from Irenaeus and Hippolytus or more recently from the Nag Hammadi texts. As suggested in the second article in this series,¹² perhaps the Christological use of the noun πλήρωμα in Colossians was designed to refute Gnostic ideas associated with that term in the heresy, but even if that were so, this does not give much help in ascertaining what those Gnostic ideas were.

Nothing would be extraordinary in a system of incipient Gnosticism expanding in such a way as to make room for Christian elements within itself. An analogy to such an expansion has been detected in the relationship of two of the Nag Hammadi texts—*Eugnostos the Blessed* and *The Sophia of Jesus Christ*. *Eugnostos* is a didactic letter addressed by a teacher to his disciples; the *Sophia* is a revelatory discourse delivered by the risen Christ to His followers. While *Eugnostos* has no explicit Christian content, its substance is incorporated in the *Sophia* and Christianized by means of expansions adapted to its new setting.¹³

But Gnosticism and even incipient Gnosticism must be defined before they can be used intelligently in such a discussion. A suitable definition of Gnosticism was proposed by Scholem. It is suitable in that he had in mind especially what he called “Jewish

BSac 141:563 (Jul 84) p. 200

Gnosticism.” He defined Gnosticism as a “religious” movement that proclaimed a mystical esotericism for the

elect based on illumination and the acquisition of a higher knowledge of things heavenly and divine,” the higher knowledge being “soteric” as well as “esoteric.”¹⁴

Some circles in Paul’s mission field set much store by knowledge in the sense of intellectual attainment. To discourage such attitudes he told the Corinthians that, by contrast with the upbuilding power of love, knowledge merely inflates: “If any one supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know” (1 Cor 8:1–2). Socrates commented that the Delphic oracle, in calling him the wisest of men, must have meant that he knew that he did not know, whereas others equally did not know but thought they knew.¹⁵ But when knowledge was cultivated for its own sake, as it was in the church of Corinth, it can be appreciated “into how congenial a soil the seeds of Gnosticism were about to fall.”¹⁶

As has been said, the Colossian heresy was basically Jewish. Yet the straightforward Judaizing legalism of Galatians was not envisaged in Colossians. Instead it was a form of mysticism which tempted its adepts to look on themselves as a spiritual elite.

Certainly movements within Judaism cultivated higher knowledge. Those who were caught up in such movements were unlikely to remain immune to contemporary trends like incipient Gnosticism and Neopythagoreanism. One body of Jews which laid claim to higher knowledge and special revelation was the Essene order. Lightfoot, with characteristic acumen, discerned elements of Essenism in the Colossian heresy; indeed, his three discourses “On Some Points Connected with the Essenes” appended to his commentary on Colossians, written over 100 years ago,¹⁷ provided one of the most reliable accounts of the Essenes until the discovery of the Qumran texts and the identification of the community which produced them as being at least a branch of the Essene order (an identification which may now be regarded as well established). But if the Qumran texts document the Essene order from within, one can see more clearly the kind of knowledge that was cultivated there. Repeatedly the members of the Qumran community thank God that they have been initiated into his “wonderful mysteries” which remain concealed from the uninstructed majority.”¹⁸ But in doing so the initiates seem to have in mind the insight they enjoyed into God’s

BSac 141:563 (Jul 84) p. 201

secret purpose and the epoch of its fulfillment. His purpose had been communicated to the prophets of earlier days, but many of its details remained in obscurity until the time of fulfillment approached. The time of fulfillment was now approaching, they believed; this had been revealed to the Teacher of Righteousness, together with other details of the interpretation of the prophetic oracles, and what was revealed to him he imparted to his followers.¹⁹ With regard to these mysteries Daniel had been told, “None of the wicked will understand, but those who have insight will understand” (Dan 12:10); the Teacher and his disciples believed that they were “the wise” (the חֲכָמִים) to whom this promise was made good.²⁰

There are parallels to this here and there in the New Testament,²¹ but not in the references to the Colossian heresy. It is unlikely that the Qumran community had members, even associate members, among the Jews of Phrygia; to follow anything like the Qumran way of life in a pagan environment would have been difficult indeed. But the Qumran community, and the wider Essene order of which it was apparently a branch, represented a phase of a far-flung tendency sometimes called Jewish nonconformity.²² This tendency is attested as far west as Rome; some features of Jewish practice in that city were markedly “nonconformist” in character, and persisted in later generations in Roman Christianity.²³

To look to movements within Judaism for the source of the Colossian heresy is a wiser procedure than to postulate direct influences from Iranian or Greek culture. Some religious syncretism was no doubt present in the Jewish communities of Phrygia, but some of the features of the Colossian heresy that have been thought to point to syncretism are in fact features that tend to be common to mystical experiences, regardless of the religious tradition within which they occur. And not only in Jewish nonconformity but in what was to establish itself as the mainstream of Rabbinical Judaism there was present as early as the first century B.C. a form of religious mysticism which was destined to endure for centuries.

Merkabah Mysticism

This is commonly called *merkabah* mysticism, because of the place which it gave to religious exercises designed to facilitate entry into the vision of the heavenly chariot (מְרֻכָבָה), with

BSac 141:563 (Jul 84) p. 202

God visibly enthroned above it—the vision granted to Ezekiel when he was called to his prophetic ministry (Ezek 1:15–28).²⁴ For the gaining of such a vision, punctilious observance of the *minutiae* of the Mosaic Law, especially the law of purification, was essential. Moreover, in addition to what the Law required of every pious Jew, a period of asceticism, variously estimated to be 12 or 40 days, was a necessary preparation. Then when the heavenly ascent was attempted the mediatorial role of angels was indispensable. It was important therefore not to incur their hostility, for the ascent was attended by great perils.

Rabbinical tradition includes a well-known account of the privilege of entering paradise once granted to Rabbi Aqiba and three of his colleagues. Aqiba was the only one of the four to return unscathed. Of the others, one died, one went mad, and one committed apostasy.²⁵ The apostasy of Elisha ben Abuyah perhaps illustrated the dangers of the mystical ascent even more than what befell his two companions: even for one who came through physically unharmed there was the risk of being so unbalanced by the experience that one could no longer distinguish truth from error. Nor is this surprising: it is true to this day that people who have mystical experiences tend to attach more importance to what they saw or heard in the course of such an experience than to the sober truth of the Word of God.

In this context it is impossible to forget that Paul himself once had a mystical experience of this kind, when he was caught away into paradise (2 Cor 12:2–9). So far as can be judged from his account, the experience came to him unsought, with no ascetic preparation. He could not and dared not divulge what he heard on that occasion. The accounts of Paul's conversion have echoes of Ezekiel's inaugural vision,²⁶ but (quite apart from chronological difficulties) Paul's experience cannot be identified with his conversion experience. He was quite ready to tell what he heard on the Damascus Road—the command of the risen Lord to be His apostle to the Gentile world. But for the rest of Paul's life he carried with him a memento of his ascent into paradise in the form of a humiliating and recurring “thorn in the flesh” (2 Cor 12:7). Paul learned to accept this physical affliction, whatever its precise nature, as a prophylactic against the spiritual pride that was prone to beset those who had made the heavenly ascent. If ever he was tempted to rely on the “abundance of revelations” received then, the thorn in the flesh would remind him to rely on the Lord alone, apart from whose grace he would be useless.

BSac 141:563 (Jul 84) p. 203

The risk of excessive elation from which Paul experienced such a painful deliverance may be related to the terms in which he describes the self-reliant adept in Colossians 2:18, as “inflated without cause by his fleshly mind.”

Merkabah mysticism, according to Gershom Scholem, the leading 20th-century authority on the subject, was originally “a Jewish variation on one of the chief preoccupations of the second and third century gnostics and hermetics: the ascent of the soul from the earth, through the spheres of the hostile planet-angels and rulers of the cosmos, and its return to its divine home in the ‘fullness’ of God's light, a return which, to the Gnostic's mind, signified Redemption.”²⁷ Recalling Scholem's definition of Gnosticism, already quoted, *merkabah* mysticism could well be described, in his words, as “Jewish Gnosticism.” The throne world into which the *merkabah* mystic endeavored to enter was to him “what the pleroma, the ‘fullness,’ the bright sphere of divinity with its potencies, aeons, archons, and dominions is to the Hellenistic and early Christian mystics of the period who appear in the history of religion under the names of Gnostics and Hermetics.”²⁸

Perhaps the earliest description of the heavenly ascent in the literature of this mystical tradition is found in 1 Enoch 14:8–23, belonging probably to the early first century B.C. Here Enoch describes his upward flight to the dwelling place of God, the “great Glory” seated on the chariot-throne, attended by the cherubim. His description is based partly on Ezekiel’s account of his inaugural vision and partly on Daniel’s vision of “the Ancient of Days” (Dan 7:9–10).

As time went on the details were elaborated. Enoch speaks of two celestial houses, the throne-room of God being situated in the second and higher of the two; but later descriptions of the ascent speak of the seven heavens which have to be passed through, each controlled by its archon, while within the seventh heaven itself the mystic must pass through seven halls or palaces (*hekalôth*), each with its angelic gatekeeper.²⁹ Only after these had all been safely negotiated was it possible to see the throne of glory. Before the throne of glory stood the angels of the presence, singing the praise of God; to participate in their worship and repeat their hymns was a privilege highly valued by those who completed the ascent. This is certainly part at least of what is involved in the “worship of angels” (ἠρησκεία τῶν ἀγγέλων, Col 2:18). That the genitive (τῶν ἀγγέλων) is subjective is

BSac 141:563 (Jul 84) p. 204

maintained among others, by F. O. Francis and A. J. Bandstra: sharing in the angelic liturgy, they hold, is what is meant.³⁰ But, high as this privilege may be, nothing in it is reprehensible; otherwise the Christian church would be at fault for taking over the *Trisagion* (“Holy, Holy, Holy”) from the seraphim whose words made such an impression on Isaiah. It is not improbable that in the Colossian heresy some tribute of worship was paid to the angelic powers.

It cannot be proved that *merkabah* mysticism was cultivated by some and recommended to others in the Christian communities of the Lycus Valley. But the heavenly ascent which is implied in Colossians 2:18 appears to have been of the same character as the experience which the *merkabah* mystics sought. And if their system had the slightest tendency to syncretism, it was almost inevitable that the seven heavens under their respective archons, or the seven palaces guarded by their respective gatekeepers, should be correlated with the seven planetary spheres ruled by their respective lords. Those who passed through the realms where such powers held sway would be careful not to offend them; otherwise they would be hindered in the completion of their upward journey, or else impeded in their return to earth.

The Elements of the World

When the lords of the planetary spheres are mentioned, the question is naturally raised, is there possibly a relationship between them and the στοιχεῖα or elemental forces against which Paul warns his readers (Col 2:8, 20; cf Gal 4:3, 9)? The use of the term στοιχεῖα with regard to heavenly bodies is not otherwise attested before the second-century Diogenes Laertius, who seems to use it of the signs of the zodiac.³¹ But if regard be paid to the context in which the term appears in the Pauline writings, one can see why Nock said that “in the στοιχεῖα Jewish and planetary ideas meet.”³² He pointed out an analogy between bondage to the στοιχεῖα, against which the Galatian and Colossian churches are warned, and bondage to the planetary powers, in other words, to fate. From these powers, according to the first *Poimandres* tractate in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, human beings can escape by receiving the knowledge of the truth.³³

However, quite apart from such an analogy (which does not amount to an identity), the Pauline context (especially in Gal 4:9–10) suggests a close connection between bondage to the

BSac 141:563 (Jul 84) p. 205

στοιχεῖα and the observance of “days and months and seasons and years” as matters of religious obligation. These divisions of time, according to Genesis 1:14, were regulated by the lights placed by God “in the firmament of the heaven” (the sun and moon were the two principal planets in ancient reckoning of time). But when these lights, or the forces believed to control them, were given independent status, and the

calendar which they controlled was treated as a binding element in divine worship, then the allegiance due to the Creator alone was in danger of being paid to His creatures. Of course Paul did not think there were such beings as lords of the planetary spheres, but he knew that to those who believed in them they could become enslaving forces, just as an idol, which was “nothing in the world” to a believer in the living and true God, could nevertheless be an instrument of demonic oppression to pagans (1 Cor 8:4, 7; 10:19–21). Such enslaving forces might well be numbered among the στοιχεῖα of the world, from which the gospel liberated the souls of men and women.

Some people today, as then, love to make a parade of exceptional piety. They claim to have found the way to a higher plane of spiritual experience, as though they had been initiated into sacred mysteries which give them an almost infinite advantage over the uninitiated. Others are all too prone to be impressed by such people. But Paul warns them against being misled by such lofty claims. Those who make them, for all their lofty pretensions, for all their boasting of the special insight which they have received into divine reality, are simply inflated by unspiritual pride and are out of touch with Him who is the true Head and Fount of life and knowledge.

If people practice various forms of abstinence and find their spiritual health improved thereby, that is their own responsibility. But if they make their abstinence a matter of boasting, and if they try to impose it on others, they are wrong. As for those who draw public attention to their abstinence so as to gain some measure of veneration, they must learn that there is no necessary connection between such impressive asceticism and the true humility of Christ. By contrast with the spiritual service which the gospel enjoins in conformity with the will of God, which is “good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2), this would-be religion is a “self-made cult,” as Deissmann rendered it,³⁴ or a “faked religion,” as H. N. Bate put it.³⁵

The compound ἐθελοθησκεῖα implies that those who

BSac 141:563 (Jul 84) p. 206

practiced it thought they were presenting to God something over and above His basic requirements—a supererogatory devotion by which they hoped to acquire merit in His sight. But far from being of any avail against the indulgence of the “flesh,” as its proponents claimed, it could coexist with arrogant self-conceit, making it difficult for those who accepted it to acknowledge that before God they were sinners in need of His saving grace. When they commended harsh treatment of the body as a specific against fleshly indulgence, they thought in terms of a Platonic antithesis between body and soul. But this is not Paul’s point of view. When he speaks of severity to the *body*, he means the body in its ordinary sense, but when he refers to “indulgence of the *flesh*,” he means unregenerate human nature in its rebellion against God. A chief ingredient in that rebellion is the proud spirit of self-sufficiency which has nothing to do with the body in the ordinary sense, but springs from the will. The asceticism recommended by the false teachers at Colossae feeds this particular indulgence of the “flesh” instead of starving it; hence the need of spiritual transformation which Paul insists is by “the renewing of your mind” (Rom 12:2).

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Morna D. Hooker, “Were There False Teachers in Colossae?” in *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament*, eds. B. Lindars and S. S. Smalley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 315-31.

2

Cf. W. Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth*, trans. J. E. Stealy (New York: Abingdon Press, 1971), pp. 261-66; *Paul and the Gnostics*, trans. J. E. Stealy (New York: Abingdon Press, 1972), p. 18; and W. Marxsen, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. G. Buswell (Oxford: Blackwell, 1968), pp. 55, 58.

3

Cf. 1 Corinthians 8:8.

4

John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians* (1549), trans. T. H. L. Parker (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1965), pp. 297-98.

5

Pseudo-Dionysius *Celestial Hierarchy* 1.1.

6

Eduard Schweizer, "Die 'Elemente der Welt' Gal 4, 3.9; Col 2, 8.20," in *Verborum Veritas*, O. Böcher and K. Haacker, eds. (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1970), pp. 245-59.

7

Richard Reitzenstein, *Das iranische Erlösungsmysterium* (Bonn: Marcus & Weber, 1921).

8

Martin Dibellus, "The Isis Initiation in Apuleius and Related Initiatory Rites" (1917), in *Conflict at Colossae*, eds. F. O. Francis and W. A. Meeks (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975), pp. 61-121.

9

Martin Dibelius, *An die Kolosser* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1912), on Colossians 2:18; William M. Ramsay, "Ancient Mysteries and Their Relation to St. Paul," *Athenaeum*, January 25, 1913, pp. 106-7; idem, *The Teaching of Paul in Terms of the Present Day* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1913), pp. 286-304.

10

The classical sense of ἐμβατεύω is "investigate"; if that be the sense here, then the majority reading ἃ μὴ ἑώρακεν ἐμβατεύων ("investigating what he has not seen") is apposite.

11

Cf. Hippolytus *Refutation of Heresies* 5.8.4.

12

F. F. Bruce, "The 'Christ Hymn' of Colossians 1:15–20," part 2 of Colossian Problems, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141 (April-June 1984): 99-111.

13

These two treatises, in D. M. Parrott's English translation, are set conveniently in parallel columns in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, ed. J. M. Robinson (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977), pp. 206-28; the Christian expansions in the *Sophia* are thus easily recognized. Cf. M. Krause, "The Christianization of Gnostic Texts," in *The New Testament and Gnosis*, eds. A. J. M. Wedderburn and A. H. B. Logan (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983).

14

Gershom G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1960), p. 1.

15

Plato *Apology of Socrates* 21A-23B.

16

R. Law, *The Tests of Life*, 3d ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1914), p. 28.

17

J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1879), pp. 347–419, reprinted in his *Dissertations on the Apostolic Age* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1892), pp. 323-407.

18

1QH 2.13, etc.

19

1QPHab 7.1-5 (on Hab 2:3); CD 1.11-12.

20

1QH 12.11-12.

21

Cf. 1 Peter 1:10–12.

22

Cf. M. Black, *The Scrolls and Christian Origins* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1961), pp. 75-88, 164–72. See also Edwin M. Yamauchi, “Qumran and Colosse,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 121 (April-June 1964): 141-52.

23

Cf. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, “On the Baptismal Rite according to St. Hippolytus,” *Studia Patristica 2 = Texte und Untersuchungen* 64 (1957): 93-105.

24

In addition to the work cited in note 14 cf. Gershom G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 5th ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), pp. 39-78; “Merkabah Mysticism,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 11 (Jerusalem: n.p., 1971), cols. 1386–89. For the importance of this element in the thought-world of early Christianity, see C. Rowland, *The Open Heaven* (London: SPCK, 1982).

25

Tos. *Hagigah* 2.3–4; TB *Hagigah* 14b; TJ *Hagigah* 77b; *Song of Songs Rabba* 1.4.

26

Cf. Seyoon Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), pp. 206-23.

27

Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 48.

28

Ibid., p. 43.

29

From these “palaces” some of the principal mystical treatises receive their names: the *Lesser Hekhalôth*; the *Greater Hekhalôth* (edited with an English translation by H. Odeberg: *3 Enoch or The Hebrew Book of Enoch* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928]); the *Treatise of the Hekhalôth* (German translation by A. Wünsche in *Aus Israels Lehrhallen* [Leipzig: E. Pfeiffer, 1909], 3:33–47).

30

F. O. Francis, “Humility and Angel Worship in Col 2:18,” in *Conflict at Colossae*, pp. 176-81; A. J. Bandstra, “Did the Colossian Errorists Need a Mediator?” in *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, eds. Richard N. Longenecker and Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), pp. 329-43. From Qumran and Masada have come portions of an angelic liturgy which takes up the theme, “Praise God, all ye angels,” and exhorts the angels, under many names, to offer various forms of worship to God. The exhortation formed part of the liturgy of the burnt offering Sabbath by Sabbath throughout the year; the liturgy of the people of God on earth was designed to reproduce that presented to Him on high by the heavenly host. See J. Strugnell, “The Angelic Liturgy at Qumran: 4Q Sirôt Ôlat Hassabbât,” *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960), pp. 318-45.

31

Diogenes Laertius *Lives of Philosophers* 6.102 (going back to a first-century source).

32

A. D. Nock, *Early Gentile Christianity and its Hellenistic Background* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 98, n. 4.

33

Corpus Hermeticum 1.15.19-26.

34

Adolf Deissmann, *Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History*, trans. W. E. Wilson (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1926), p. 118. He contrasts it with the λογικὴ λατρεία of Romans 12:1.

35

H. N. Bate, *A Guide to the Epistles of St. Paul* (London: Longmans & Green, 1926), p. 143.

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