

Philippians 2:6-11
An Argument for Multivalence

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One of the most intensely disputed passages in the Pauline corpus is the “*Carmen Christi*” in Philippians 2:6-11. Much of the debate rests upon the assumption that each of the arguments is mutually exclusive; the hymn’s author could have had only one theme in mind while composing it. This paper will briefly survey the interpretive complexities of this passage and explore a possible approach for reconciling the various conflicting views.

For convenience, the text of the “hymn” is reproduced here:

⁶Who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
⁷but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
⁸ he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.
⁹Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.¹

Original Language of the Hymn

Before moving onto the substance of the hymn, this paper will address the scholarly opinions on the issue of its composition. While it is generally accepted to have been a pre-Pauline liturgical hymn,² there does not appear to be a consensus concerning the language in which this hymn was originally composed.

¹ NRSV

² L. Michael White, “Morality Between Two Worlds: A Paradigm of Friendship in Philippians” in David L. Balch, Everett Ferguson, and Wayne A. Meeks, eds., *Greeks, Romans, and Christians: Essays in Honor of Abraham J.*

After explaining that the “nature and wording of the Jewish *Vorlage* have been the subject of considerable conjecture,” L. White argues that “there remains little that is exclusively Jewish in the hymn, at least in its present form.”³ M. Hengel is not nearly as generous when he writes, “Although it has its models in the Psalms, it is composed in acceptable Greek...[it] is almost impossible to translate it back into a Semitic language. [This hymn] is translated neither from Aramaic nor from Hebrew.”⁴

Other scholars take issue with this assertion. For example, some argue that Paul’s is a “thoroughly Jewish thought world, without significant indebtedness to Greco-Roman thought.”⁵ Structurally, this hymn “does not conform to the rules of Greek poetry. Its pattern of regular stresses and the use of parallelism remind us of Hebrew poetry (as in the psalms); thus it has been suggested that it was originally composed in Aramaic.”⁶ J. Fitzmyer has meticulously reviewed previous attempts by scholars to uncover the Aramaic “original” of the hymn, and in doing so includes his own reverse-translation.⁷ His conclusions “support the contention that the passage represents a pre-Pauline rhetorical composition of Jewish-Christian origin.”⁸

There are scholars, however, who straddle the academic fence on this issue. E. Lohmeyer concluded “that the poem was originally written in Greek by a poet whose mother-tongue was Semitic.”⁹ Similarly, J. Dunn writes that “this hymn seems to be a rather unusual mesh of

Malherbe (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), p. 207. See footnote 26 for an extensive list of sources that deal directly with this issue.

³ White, “Morality Between Two Worlds,” p. 208.

⁴ Martin Hengel, *Studies in Early Christology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), p. 289.

⁵ Ben Witherington III, *The Paul Quest: The Renewed Search for the Jew of Tarsus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), p. 235.

⁶ Leander Keck, ed., *The New Interpreter's Bible*. Vol. 11 (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2000), p. 501.

⁷ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “The Aramaic Background of Philippians 2:6-11,” *CBQ* 50 (1988) pp. 470-83.

⁸ Fitzmyer, “The Aramaic Background of Philippians 2:6-11,” p. 483.

⁹ Fitzmyer, “The Aramaic Background of Philippians 2:6-11,” p. 471.

different influences from Judaism and Hellenism.”¹⁰ Perhaps R. Martin put it best when he states that the author “stands at the juncture of two cultures.”¹¹ Paul was steeped in the language and imagery of the Hebrew bible, but as an apostle to the Gentiles (not nearly as familiar with the Hebrew bible) he would have needed to speak in terms that they would have understood. This necessary “meshing” of cultures in the person of Paul makes it incredibly difficult to emphasize either strictly Jewish or strictly Hellenistic elements within the hymn.

General Interpretations

The first item to consider is the scholarly interpretation of the hymn as a whole. Through the years, there have been general trends in approaching the text. “Older interpretations...tended to see its function primarily as a moral example, an *imitatio Christi*, pointing to self-humiliation and asceticism as the ideal moral life for the Christian.”¹² Instead of viewing this hymn as an abstract moral example for early Christians, some scholars have viewed it through the lens of Hellenistic virtues and moral paradigms. White uses the letter to the Philippians to examine Paul’s moral world view. He argues that this letter shows “Paul’s social environment in his dependence upon Hellenistic moral conventions” and that the apostle “would have been very much at home in Philo’s world- much more so than, say, in the highly stigmatized worldview of apocalyptic dualism at Qumran.”¹³ Instead, the language used in the letter as a whole points to “the framework of a paradigm of virtue,” namely, friendship.¹⁴ This approach points to the

¹⁰ James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1977), p. 135.

¹¹ Ralph Martin, *Carmen Christi: Philippians ii. 5-11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship* (London: Cambridge U.P., 1967), p. 297.

¹² White, “Morality Between Two Worlds,” p. 209.

¹³ White, “Morality Between Two Worlds,” p. 205.

¹⁴ White, “Morality Between Two Worlds,” p. 212.

emphasis on community life throughout the letter. White argues that Paul used the hymn to show that in humbling himself, Jesus demonstrated perfectly the virtue of friendship.

A further refinement of this moralistic interpretation is given by J. Hellerman in his book *Reconstructing Honor in Roman Philippi: Carmen Christi as Cursus Pudorum*.¹⁵ He describes Rome's *cursus honorum* and argues that the hymn portrays a reversal of that system; Jesus held a supreme position of honor, yet he chose to take upon himself "progressively degrading positions of social status."¹⁶ Hellerman draws upon archaeological evidence to demonstrate that the citizens of the city of Philippi were very familiar with the *cursus honorum*, which proved to be a useful analogy for life in this Christian community. He writes, "Paul's central concerns in Philippians 2 are not soteriological but, rather, ecclesiological in nature."¹⁷ Paul is not, according to Hellerman, portraying Jesus' suffering in order to promise the Philippian congregation "vindication for suffering at the hands of outsiders."¹⁸ Instead, Paul uses the actions of Jesus as a paradigm for relations *within* the community. Hellerman's position is summarized in the following: "The implication, then, is that God will fully and finally vindicate—that is, greatly honor— all who, like Jesus, use their status and power for the benefit of others in the community."¹⁹ From this perspective, the hymn is not soteriological. Instead, similar to the earlier interpretations, it provides a model for the Christian community.

This way of viewing the hymn has been superseded more recently by a "soteriological interpretation." From this perspective, "the hymn is seen as a statement of the mechanism of salvation, not an exemplar to be followed."²⁰ Such an interpretation has led scholars to identify

¹⁵ Joseph H. Hellerman, *Reconstructing Honor in Roman Philippi: Carmen Christi as Cursus Pudorum* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹⁶ Hellerman, *Reconstructing Honor in Roman Philippi*, p. 130.

¹⁷ Hellerman, *Reconstructing Honor in Roman Philippi*, p. 156.

¹⁸ Hellerman, *Reconstructing Honor in Roman Philippi*, p. 156.

¹⁹ Hellerman, *Reconstructing Honor in Roman Philippi*, p. 156.

²⁰ White, "Morality Between Two Worlds," p. 209.

the prevalent themes in the hymn in order to ascertain how early Christian communities understood Jesus and the “mechanism of salvation.” Since these scholars have generally tried to distill a single theme from the hymn, each of these themes will be dealt with individually.

Enthronement

One theme that some have claimed to be most prevalent is enthronement. E. Käsemann saw in this hymn a “heavenly enthronement motif” where Jesus was depicted as ruler over the cosmos.”²¹ This approach views the end of the passage (verses 9-11) as the emphasis of the hymn. These verses describe the bestowal of a royal title and the subsequent obeisance of inferiors (themes present in the enthronement ceremonies of neighboring cultures). In regards to the hymn’s soteriology, Käsemann notes that “the divine act at the enthronement of Christ shows that the action of him who was obedient on earth affects the whole world and is a salvation-event.”²² R. Scroggs, in analyzing various early Christian hymnic / liturgical materials, finds that “common, indeed central, to most of the discovered liturgical materials in the New Testament is the acclamation of Jesus Christos Kyrios, the exaltation and enthronement of the resurrected Jesus to the position of cosmocrator.”²³ As one of the earliest pieces of Christian liturgy, these scholars argue, the Philippian hymn is an excellent example of the theme of enthronement.

Related to this theme of enthronement is the view that the imagery in the hymn points to the Roman emperor. Scroggs writes, “It may not be too daring to suggest that the enthronement

²¹ Robert Morgan, “Incarnation, Myth, and Theology: Ernst Käsemann’s Interpretation of Philippians 2:5-11” in Ralph P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd, eds., *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2* (Louisville, KY: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1998), p. 63.

²² Ernst Käsemann, “A Critical Analysis of Philippians 2:5-11” in Robert W. Funk, ed., *God and Christ: Existence and Province* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1968), p. 77.

²³ Robin Scroggs, “Christ the Cosmocrator and the Experience of the Believers” in Abraham J. Malherbe and Wayne A. Meeks, eds., *The Future of Christology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 161.

is pictured on the model of accession to power of a human ruler (Caesar?).”²⁴ While Scroggs stops short of attributing the specific theme to that of the Roman emperorship, other scholars have continued along this line of reasoning. Specifically, P. Oakes notes that “in Roman political terms, in the Julio-Claudian period, the ‘name above every name’ could only belong to the Emperor himself,”²⁵ and “the title *κρότος* itself...was likely to provide a further link back to the Emperor.”²⁶ After cataloging archaeological evidence of numerous inscriptions made to the supreme Roman ruler, Hellerman suggests that “Paul intends to contrast a divine Jesus with a divine emperor. The centrality of the imperial cult in first-century Philippi also points in this direction.”²⁷ This avenue of thought seeks to situate the hymn in its socio-historical setting of a Roman province under the jurisdiction of an emperor. From this perspective, Jesus’ sovereignty was understood in terms of a real Roman emperor who possessed real power.

Wisdom

Other scholars propose that the theme of a personified Wisdom is most prevalent in the hymn. Drawing parallels mostly from the texts of the *Wisdom of Solomon* and the *Wisdom of Jesus ben Sira*, B. Witherington suggests that the hymn “is a story about a king who *is* the very embodiment of Wisdom, both before, during, and after his earthly career, as is shown by his behavior during all three stages of his career.”²⁸ Using the *Wisdom of Solomon* and the Septuagint, J. Murphy-O’Connor wrote an in-depth analysis of this theme. His view is that “Wisdom provides a consistent background which permits a homogeneous explanation of all the

²⁴ Robin Scroggs, “Paul: Myth Remaker” in Janice Capel Anderson, Philip Sellew, and Claudia Setzer, eds., *Pauline Conversations in Context* (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), p. 90.

²⁵ Peter Oakes, *Philippians: From People to Letter* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 170.

²⁶ Oakes, *Philippians*, p. 171.

²⁷ Hellerman, *Reconstructing Honor in Roman Philippi*, p. 152.

²⁸ Ben Witherington, *Paul’s Narrative Thought World: The Tapestry of Tragedy and Triumph* (Louisville, KY: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1994), p. 100.

elements in the original Philippian hymn.”²⁹ Throughout his article, Murphy-O’Connor went to great lengths to show that this was the *only* valid approach to analyzing the hymn.

Adam

Lastly, in regards to soteriology, the majority of recent scholars have concerned themselves with answering the question: “does the passage refer to the action of a preexistent savior who ‘empties himself’ and ‘becomes’ man, or does it refer from start to finish to the action of a human being, Jesus of Nazareth?”³⁰ This question hinges on the interpretation of one primary theme: “It is agreed by virtually all on both sides of the question that the ‘hymn’ employs an Adam-Christ parallel.”³¹ This is intriguing, given the absence of any specific mention of Adam within the hymn itself. Those who espouse this Adamic theme are divided into two camps: those who argue for an “anthropological” approach to the hymn, and those who propose a “preexistence” interpretation.³²

J. Dunn is an excellent representative of the “anthropological” camp. In this view, the hymn “is structured both to reflect God’s intention in creating humankind (Adam), and to contrast the traditional understanding of Adam’s failure.”³³ He argues that the answer to the question above lies in Paul’s use of Adam Christology. According to Dunn, Paul emphasizes the human nature of Jesus, and therefore this hymn does in fact, “refer from start to finish”³⁴ to a very human Jesus. Dunn and others who share this view focus on finding parallels between the language and imagery of Genesis 1-3. While the language used in the hymn is not exactly the

²⁹ Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “Christological Anthropology in Phil., II, 6-11,” *Revue Biblique* 83 (1976), p. 49.

³⁰ Lincoln D. Hurst, “Christ, Adam, and Preexistence Revisited” in Ralph P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd, eds., *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2* (Louisville, KY: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1998), p. 84.

³¹ Hurst, “Christ, Adam, and Preexistence Revisited,” p. 84.

³² Hurst, “Christ, Adam, and Preexistence Revisited,” p. 84.

³³ James D. G. Dunn, “Christ, Adam, and Preexistence” in Ralph P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd, eds., *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2* (Louisville, KY: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1998), p. 74.

³⁴ Hurst, “Christ, Adam, and Preexistence Revisited,” p. 84.

same as that found in the Septuagint version of those chapters, these scholars argue that the *imagery* is still present.

Those on the other side of the argument propose that the hymn portrays the glory of a preexistent Jesus who suffered earthly humiliation (which was the result of Adam's fall) but was ultimately exalted. This view can be visualized with the following illustration: "[This] movement of thought [can be] likened to a parabola- the curve of divine self-humbling from heaven to earth reaching its lowest point in death [on the cross], and then sweeping heavenwards again in Christ's exaltation to divine lordship over all."³⁵ These scholars view the hymn as a single conceptual unit that emphasizes the contrast between Jesus' pre-mortal / post-mortal glory and the lack of that same glory in his life and death. Appealing primarily to other New Testament passages (such as John 1), they argue that the concept of a pre-existent Jesus was known and appreciated among early Christian communities.

These two views regarding Jesus' relation to Adam are heavily disputed. Dunn states that the view of a "preexistent" Jesus is dependent upon the presupposition of an "incarnation,"³⁶ and argues that this is a faulty assumption. However, in analyzing Dunn's case, L. Hurst demonstrates that there are a number of flaws in the argument for a strictly "anthropological" interpretation of the hymn.³⁷ This back-and-forth argument is representative of the scholarly debate over the meaning of this short hymn; there does not appear to be any emerging consensus. Could there be a reason why none of these exclusivist claims has emerged triumphant?

³⁵ James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 114.

³⁶ Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, p. 114.

³⁷ Hurst, "Christ, Adam, and Preexistence Revisited," pp. 85-90.

“In heaven and on earth and under the earth” (ἐπουρανίων καὶ ἐπιγείων καὶ καταχθονίων)

This phrase from verse ten touches indirectly upon each of the aforementioned issues. Surprisingly, it has received only cursory attention from scholars. The remainder of this paper will demonstrate how its conflicting interpretations may provide an insight into how scholars may understand the hymn as a whole.

Whether or not this phrase even belonged to the original hymn has been disputed by scholars.³⁸ For example, Murphy-O’Connor argues that “this phrase...is an interpolation, and cannot be invoked to determine the intention of the author of the original hymn.”³⁹ Lohmeyer went as far to suggest that these words would be “unthinkable in a Semitic language.”⁴⁰ On the other hand, Scroggs argues that since the “listing of subservient powers is frequent in [hymnic] materials,” this phrase is not an addition or interpolation.⁴¹ Others, however, feel the question is not critical to understanding the hymn. L. Krietzer writes, “A decision about this one way or the other does not substantially affect the basic meaning of vv. 9-11.”⁴² But what exactly is that “basic meaning?” What is the nature of those things “in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth?”

There are three general explanations given for what these words represent. Many suggest that they refer to non-human entities. Others propose that the imagery invokes humanity, and some have interpreted this phrase as a general statement signifying universality. This paper will now examine the arguments for each of these assertions.⁴³

³⁸ For a survey of the arguments involved in this debate, see Murphy-O’Connor, “Christological Anthropology in Phil., II, 6-11,” pp. 27-29.

³⁹ Murphy-O’Connor, “Christological Anthropology in Phil., II, 6-11,” p. 48.

⁴⁰ Fitzmyer, “The Aramaic Background of Philippians 2:6-11,” p. 471.

⁴¹ Robin Scroggs, “Paul: Myth Remaker,” p. 89.

⁴² Larry J. Kreitzer, “When He at Last is First,” in Ralph P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd, eds., *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2* (Louisville, KY: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1998), p. 120.

⁴³ For an excellent overview of the scholarly debate over this phrase up to the mid-1960s, see Ralph P. Martin, *Carmen Christi*, pp. 257-265.

Principalities, Powers, and other Non-human Entities

The “common view” is that “the three categories...refer to spiritual beings or the ‘powers and principalities’ of the cosmos.”⁴⁴ Some have merely interpreted this phrase in passing, making such comments as “all heavenly and earthly ‘powers’ must bow the knee before him,”⁴⁵ or that God put “the right authority in place over the Cosmos.”⁴⁶ Others, however, go into greater depth to describe what these powers are and what their function is in the cosmos.

Martin explains that this view has arisen through the examination of non-Christian literature. From such an investigation, scholars argue that these terms in the hymn refer to “spirit-forces which the ancients thought to control the inhabitants in heaven, on earth and in the underworld.”⁴⁷ In the hymn, this phrase could have been used to demonstrate that, “Jesus is *not only* ruler over the earth and its human subjects but also ruler over the invisible powers and principalities (above? beyond? below? the earth) that were commonly thought to determine the destiny of humans in the world.”⁴⁸ These “powers” were often personified. Thus, one can say that “the mighty angelic powers which were thought to rule over the realms of the cosmos—astral, terrestrial and chthonic”⁴⁹ were made to confess Jesus’ authority. This confession was not viewed as a passive, peaceful event for some scholars, but “as a struggle with the angelic powers”⁵⁰ over whom Jesus would emerge victorious.

One of the most articulate proponents of this view was Käsemann. He argues that verses 9-11 contained the theme of a “heavenly enthronement,” and the “name” given to Jesus was

⁴⁴ Kreitzer, “When He at Last is First,” p. 120.

⁴⁵ Martin Hengel, *Christ and Power* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), p. 27.

⁴⁶ Oakes, *Philippians*, p. 170.

⁴⁷ Martin, *Carmen Christi*, p. 258.

⁴⁸ Scroggs, “Paul: Myth Remaker,” p. 88, fn. 6.

⁴⁹ Martin, *Carmen Christi*, p. 259.

⁵⁰ Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), p. 66.

“part of the presentation ceremony before the divine court.”⁵¹ This is an act of “cosmic veneration”⁵² wherein “spiritual powers and not human beings are the actual representatives of the cosmos.”⁵³ In this view, the confession of mortals was not the subject of the hymn.

Käsemann makes this argument contextually: “It would be peculiar indeed if human beings were put on par with the spiritual powers of heaven and the underworld.”⁵⁴ Instead, in reciting the hymn, “the Christian community on earth takes up antiphonally what is happening in the divine court where the powers are prostrate before God’s throne.”⁵⁵ Thus, mortals (of whom the community consisted) were simply observers, not active participants in the cosmological drama portrayed in the hymn.

Spirits, Mortals, and the Blessed Dead

Another group of scholars view this hymn much more anthropocentrically. Some only hint at this view by using such interpretive phrases as “exalted by God above the masses,”⁵⁶ or “all intelligent creatures owe him obeisance.”⁵⁷ Others are more direct. While they agree that the hymn portrays the grand scope of Jesus’ sovereignty, these scholars argue that the phrase “in heaven and on earth and under the earth” does not exclude mortals. J. Müller interprets the three categories as: “first of all, the heavenly beings, the angels, or...the whole world of spirits;

⁵¹ Käsemann, “A Critical Analysis of Philippians 2:5-11,” p. 76.

⁵² Morgan, “Incarnation, Myth, and Theology: Ernst Käsemann’s Interpretation of Philippians 2:5-11,” p. 64.

⁵³ Käsemann, “A Critical Analysis of Philippians 2:5-11,” p. 79.

⁵⁴ Käsemann, “A Critical Analysis of Philippians 2:5-11,” p. 79.

⁵⁵ Morgan, “Incarnation, Myth, and Theology: Ernst Käsemann’s Interpretation of Philippians 2:5-11,” p. 67. This idea may have been held by those responsible for the “Angelic Liturgy” at Qumran (4Q400-407). J. Scott writes, “The worshipper who hears the songs has the sense of being in the Heavenly sanctuary and in the presence of the angelic priests. The large number of manuscripts of the Angelic Liturgy found at Qumran...makes it probable that the recitation of these songs was a major vehicle for the experience of communion with the angels as it is alluded to in the Thanksgiving Hymns (1QH 3:21-23; 11:13) and in the Rule of the Community (1QS 11:7-8).” James M. Scott, “Throne-Chariot Mysticism in Qumran and in Paul” in Craig A. Evans and Peter W. Flint, eds., *Eschatology, Messianism, and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 104.

⁵⁶ Jürgen Becker, *Paul: Apostle to the Gentiles* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), p. 317.

⁵⁷ Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Letters of Paul* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), p. 307.

then...the living people on the earth; and finally those who are under the earth, by which is meant the deceased souls, those who have ‘descended’ into Hades.”⁵⁸

G. Fee acknowledges the submission of the aforementioned “spiritual powers” in this hymn. However, he argues these are included among those “in heaven,” as there is “no evidence that [Paul] understood them to inhabit earth and Sheol.”⁵⁹ Fee interprets this verse from an eschatological perspective. Those in heaven include “all heavenly beings, angels, and demons,” those in earth include “all those who are living on earth at [Jesus’] Parousia,” and those under the earth “refer to ‘the dead,’ who also shall be raised to acknowledge [Jesus’] lordship over all.”⁶⁰ While Martin noted that this is the view that many “older” scholars took,⁶¹ there are serious scholars who currently agree with this interpretation.

Generally Speaking

Those who only gloss over this phrase frequently espouse a general interpretation. Phrases such as “universal submission, universal acclamation,”⁶² and “the unrestricted dominion of the Lord”⁶³ point to an abstract concept of things “in heaven and on earth and under the earth.” R. Bauckham suggests that the phrase emphasizes “the universality of the worship given to Christ with a formula encompassing the whole creation.”⁶⁴ Some scholars are a bit more nuanced in their interpretation, but only slightly. For instance, Dunn writes that “the assertion of universal homage before Christ (Phil. 2:10) is simply the obverse of the assertion of universal

⁵⁸ Jac. J. Müller, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 88.

⁵⁹ Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 224, fn. 35.

⁶⁰ Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, pp. 224-225.

⁶¹ Martin, *Carmen Christi*, p. 258.

⁶² Oakes, *Philippians*, p. 174.

⁶³ Ragnar Leivestad, *Christ, the Conqueror: Ideas of Conflict and Victory in the New Testament* (London: S.P.C.K., 1954), p. 113.

⁶⁴ Richard J. Bauckham, “The Worship of Jesus in Philippians 2:9-11” in Ralph P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd, eds., *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2* (Louisville, KY: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1998), p. 131.

sovereignty.”⁶⁵ Surprisingly, this general approach of modern scholars is very similar to Origen’s interpretation of this phrase: “In these three appellations the whole universe is indicated.”⁶⁶ Though times change, some exegetical approaches do not.

An Argument for Multivalence

Many of those championing different interpretations of this hymn claim that their perspective is correct, to the exclusion of all others.⁶⁷ Despite making such exclusivist arguments himself,⁶⁸ Dunn provides a valuable insight that may serve to reconcile such differences of opinion. He wrote:

Too much of the debate on the exegesis of this passage has displayed rather crass artistic or literary insensitivity. Allusions by their nature are not explicit. Poets or literary critics who had to spell out every allusion and echo would undermine their art, and deprive their more perceptive readers of the moment of illumination, the thrill of recognition. Their artistic skills would be reduced to the level of high school examination “cribs.”⁶⁹

Dunn used this approach to identify allusive elements in the hymn, and reached the conclusion that allusions to the traditional Biblical Hebrew view of Adam were present. Stopping there, he did not continue to examine the hymn for other allusions to the figure of Adam. Using Dunn’s approach, this paper will seek to identify additional allusions that may shed light on the nature of the hymn.

Caution must be exercised, however, in trying to identify each of these possible allusions. Scroggs voices the concern that “the subtlety of the allusions in this passage defies positive identification.”⁷⁰ Therefore, it is necessary to be aware of a broad range of possible allusions

⁶⁵ Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, p. 118.

⁶⁶ On First Principles 1.6.2, cited in M. J. Edwards, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philipians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), p. 255.

⁶⁷ G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007), p. 837.

⁶⁸ See Dunn, “Christ, Adam, and Preexistence,” pp. 74-83.

⁶⁹ Dunn, “Christ, Adam, and Preexistence,” p. 75.

⁷⁰ Robin Scroggs, *The Last Adam: A Study in Pauline Anthropology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 89.

within this hymn. Similarly, one must be aware of the possible combination of and interplay between allusive items in the text. The remainder of this paper will examine one such instance that has gone largely unaddressed by scholars.

The Tripartite Cosmos

“So that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth.” (Philippians 2:10)

According to Martin, the majority of exegetes recognize that the phrase “in heaven and on earth and under the earth” represents “a threefold division of the universe.”⁷¹ The question, then, is: how are these three realms of the cosmos being used in this hymn? What could this threefold division be alluding to? In understanding this passage, “our task...[is] to attune our twentieth-century ears to the concepts and overtones of the...first century AD in the eastern Mediterranean.”⁷² As addressed above, scholars have postulated a reference to either a body of strictly heavenly powers or a combination of heavenly, mortal, and departed beings. To understand the possible range of meaning for this phrase for Paul, a “Hebrew born of Hebrews” (Phil. 3:5), this paper will briefly examine the ancient Hebrew view of the tripartite cosmos.

The first verse of the Hebrew bible may reveal more about the world-view of its author(s) than first meets the eye. It reads:

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים	In the beginning God created
אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ:	the heavens and the earth.
	(Gen. 1:1)

⁷¹ Martin, *Carmen Christi*, p. 258.

⁷² Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, p. 125.

The terms שמים “heavens” and ארץ “earth” appear to be an antithetical parallel. However, if the phrase “knowledge of good (טוב) and evil (רע)” in Gen. 2:9, etc. is a merism indicating a totality of knowledge, then perhaps this reasoning can be applied to the first verse of Genesis. Wyatt suggests that here the term ארץ carries with it “overtones of the underworld.”⁷³ If this is the case, he argues that this word pair “means the entire cosmos...in an incipient, provisional condition, before a third element, the middle part, habitation of the animal kingdom and man as its pinnacle, has been added. When this is incorporated, the result is a threefold structure.”⁷⁴ It is precisely this threefold structure that is depicted in Philippians 2:10.

A number of poetic passages in the Hebrew Bible also suggest such a tripartite world-view. This comparison is particularly relevant to a discussion of the poetic *Carmen Christi* in Philippians. In the psalms, for instance, an upper cosmological element is mentioned, followed by a lower element. Then, the middle component (the inhabited world) is described:

בְּדַבַּר יְהוָה שָׁמַיִם נִעֲשׂוּ	By the word of the Yahweh the <u>heavens</u> were made,
וּבְרֵיחַ פִּי כָּל־צְבָאָם:	and by the breath of his mouth all their hosts.
כָּנָס בַּיַּד מִי הַיָּם	Gathering as a heap the waters of the sea,
נִתְּן בְּאֶצְרוֹת תְּהוֹמוֹת:	Setting in storehouses <u>the deeps</u> .
יִירָאוּ מִיְהוָה כָּל־הָאָרֶץ	Let all the underworld fear Yahweh,
מִמֶּנּוּ יִגְוְרוּ כָּל־יֹשְׁבֵי תְּבֵל:	Let all the inhabitants of <u>land</u> be afraid.

(Ps. 33:6-8)

Using much more descriptive language, this theme also appears in Isaiah:

רִנּוּ שָׁמַיִם כִּי־עָשָׂה יְהוָה	Rejoice, O <u>heavens</u> ! For Yahweh has done [it]
הֲרִיעוּ תְּחִתָּיִת אָרֶץ	Cheer, O <u>depths of the earth</u> !
פָּצְחוּ הַרִים רִנָּה	Break forth in a cry of jubilation, O <u>mountains</u> !

⁷³ N. Wyatt, *Myths of Power: A Study of Royal Myth and Ideology in Ugaritic and Biblical Tradition* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1996), p. 23.

⁷⁴ Wyatt, *Myths of Power*, p. 23.

יֵעַר וְכָל־עֵץ בּוֹ	O <u>thicket</u> and all the <u>trees</u> in it!
כִּי־גָאֵל יְהוָה יַעֲקֹב	For Yahweh has redeemed Jacob,
וּבִישְׂרָאֵל יִתְפָּאֵר:	and through Israel he shows glory.
	(Isa. 44:23-24)

Just as in the framework of the creation account in Genesis, the structure of these passages describes the top, bottom, and then middle elements of creation. This structure, according to Wyatt, is significant: “The two extremes are mentioned, and a third element, [the inhabited world], centre of the universe, is sandwiched in between, in a place of security.”⁷⁵ The question then arises: are there descriptions of a tripartite cosmos elsewhere? And if so, are they structurally similar?

A straightforward example of an alternative structure appears in Psalm 135:

כָּל אֲשֶׁר־חָפֵץ יְהוָה עָשָׂה	All that he pleases, Yahweh does:
בַּשָּׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ	In the <u>heavens</u> , and in the <u>earth</u> ,
בַּיַּמִּים וְכָל־תְּהוֹמוֹת:	in the waters and all <u>deeps</u> .
	(Ps. 135:6)

Even in the familiar “ten commandments” this cosmological literary structure is used:

לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה־לְךָ פֶסֶל	You shall not make for yourself a divine image,
וְכָל־תְּמוּנָה אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל	or any likeness that [is] in the <u>heavens</u> above
וְאֲשֶׁר בָּאָרֶץ מִתַּחַת	or that is in the <u>earth</u> beneath,
וְאֲשֶׁר בַּיַּמִּים מִתַּחַת לָאָרֶץ:	or that is in the <u>waters under the earth</u> .
	(Ex. 20:3) ⁷⁶

This verse demonstrates two important points. First, it depicts a three-tiered cosmos and does so in the order: upper→ middle→ lower. Second, it suggests that there was a socio-religious trend of worshipping entities who occupied these different levels of the cosmos. How does this cosmological context illuminate Phil. 2:10?

⁷⁵ Wyatt, *Myths of Power*, p. 23.

⁷⁶ See also Deut. 5:7.

The Hebrew Bible

The Hebrew Bible, as it now stands, is predominantly monotheistic and anthropocentric. It is distinct from the literature of the surrounding cultures in that it does not focus upon a plurality of divine beings inhabiting the cosmos. Instead, this literature is concerned with humankind and their relationship with Yahweh, the one true god. This position is emphasized in the following:

פָּנוּ-אֵלַי וְהוֹשְׁעוּ	Turn to me and be saved
כָּל-אֶפְסוּי-אָרֶץ	all the ends of the earth;
כִּי אֲנִי-אֵל וְאֵין עוֹד:	For I am God and there is no other.
בִּי נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי	I have sworn by myself;
יֵצֵא מִפִּי צְדָקָה	From my mouth righteousness has gone forth
דָּבָר וְלֹא יָשׁוּב	a word that will not turn back.
כִּי-לִי תִכְרַע כָּל-בֶּרֶךְ	For to me every knee will bow down,
תִּשָּׁבַע כָּל-לִשׁוֹן:	[and] every tongue will swear.

(Isa. 45:22-24)

In the Philippian hymn, the phrase “every knee will bow” is expanded to “every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.” Such an addition gives this allusion a cosmological twist which would have brought to mind the three-tiered structure of the cosmos as explained above.

Other passages in the Hebrew bible describe humankind’s relation to Yahweh and allude to the different divisions of the cosmos:

אָנָּה אֵלֶיךָ מִרוּחֶיךָ	Where can I go from your spirit?
וְאָנָּה מִפְּנֵיךָ אֶבְרַח:	And where from your face can I flee?
אִם-אֶסָּק שָׁמַיִם שָׁמָּה אַתָּה	If I ascend to the heavens, you are there,
וְאִצְעֶה שְׂאוֹל הֲנִי:	And [if] I make my bed in Sheol, Lo! You [are there].

(Ps. 139:7-8).

כִּי אֵל גָּדוֹל יְהוָה
וּמֶלֶךְ גָּדוֹל עַל-כָּל-אֱלֹהִים:
אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדוֹ מַחְקְרֵי-אָרֶץ
וְתוֹעֲפֹת הַרִים לוֹ:
אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ הַיָּם וְהוּא עָשָׂהוּ
וְיַבֵּשֶׁת יַדָּיו יָצְרוּ:
בָּאוּ וְשִׁתְחֹוּ וְנִבְרְעָה
נִבְרָכָה לְפָנֵי-יְהוָה עֲשֵׂנוּ:

For Yahweh is a great God
and a great king above all gods.
In whose hand are the depths of the earth,
and the peaks of the mountains are his.
To whom the sea belongs; He made it.
And the dry land; His hand formed it.
Come, let us worship and bow down,
let us kneel before Yahweh [the one who] made us.

(Ps. 95:3-6)

These passages not only describe the universality of Yahweh's reign (from the "depths of the earth" to the "heights"), but the latter passage also mentions the act of bending the knee in submission. Other divine beings are mentioned, but only in passing. Another passage describes the cosmic realms that humans were thought to inhabit:

כִּי לַיהוָה הַמְּלוּכָה וּמַשָּׁל בַּגּוֹיִם:
אֲכָלוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ | כָּל-דֹּשְׁנֵי-אָרֶץ
לְפָנָיו יִכְרְעוּ כָּל-יֹרְדֵי עָפָר
וְנַפְשׁוֹ לֹא חִיָּה:

For the kingdom is Yahweh's and he rules the nations
All the vigorous ones of the earth eat and worship,
they will bow down before him, all who descend to the dust
and [whose] soul will not live

(Ps. 22:29-30)

These verses reiterate the sovereignty of Yahweh over the nations of the inhabited world. They also mention the transition of mortals from that middle tier (the world) to the lower tier (the underworld). Thus, according to the author of this psalm, humankind occupied two realms: the living functioned in the inhabited world, and the departed who had "descended" to the underworld.

This imagery seems to bolster the argument of those who argue that Phil. 2:10 refers to heavenly beings, mortals, and the dead. However, the aforementioned passages were only

selected from the traditional (Massoretic) text of the Hebrew bible. Do other versions share the same view?

Variants

The Septuagint and the Dead Sea Scrolls are valuable for identifying various currents of belief that were circulating during the Second Temple period. One passage, when compared to the traditional Hebrew text, suggest a slightly different conceptualization of how God managed the cosmos.

The traditional Hebrew text is as follows:

זְכֹר יָמֹת עוֹלָם	Remember the days of old,
בְּיָמֵי שָׁנֹת דּוֹר־וָדוֹר	discern the years of long ago;
שְׁאַל אָבִיךָ וַיְגִדְךָ	Ask your father, that he may declare [it to] you,
זְקֵנֶיךָ וַיֹּאמְרוּ לְךָ:	your elders, that they tell [it] to you.
בְּהִנָּחַל עֲלֵיוֹן גּוֹלִים	When the Most High gave the nations an inheritance,
בְּהִפְרִידוֹ בְּנֵי אָדָם	When he divided the children of men;
יָצַב גְּבֻלַת עַמִּים	He set the boundaries of the people,
לְמִסְפַּר בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:	according to the number of the children of Israel.
כִּי חֶלֶק יְהוָה עַמּוֹ	For the territory of the LORD is his people,
יַעֲקֹב חֶבֶל נַחֲלָתוֹ:	Jacob is the portion of his possession.

(Deut. 32:7-9)

This passage appears to be a straightforward portrayal of Yahweh's singular sovereignty over the world (in general) and his care for Israel (in particular). The aforementioned versions of this verse, however, differ slightly. The Dead Sea Scrolls version reads:

When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he separated humankind, he set the bounds of the peoples according to the number of the children of God. For the Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance (4QDeutⁱ).⁷⁷

⁷⁷ English translation given in Martin G. Abegg, Peter W. Flint, and Eugene Charles Ulrich *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible: The Oldest Known Bible* (San Francisco, California: HarperSan Francisco, 1999), p. 191.

The Septuagint reads:

ὅτε διεμέριζεν ὁ ὕψιστος ἔθνη, ὡς διέσπειρεν υἱοὺς Ἀδάμ, ἔστησεν ὄρια ἔθνῶν κατὰ ἀριθμὸν ἀγγέλων θεοῦ, καὶ ἐγενήθη μερὶς κυρίου λαὸς αὐτοῦ Ἰακωβ, σχοίνισμα κληρονομίας αὐτοῦ Ἰσραηλ.

When the Most High was dividing nations, as he scattered Adam's sons, he established boundaries of nations, according to the number of God's angels. And his people Jacob became the Lord's portion, Israel the allotment of his inheritance.

(Deut. 32:7-9)

These two versions differ from the traditional Hebrew text in one significant aspect. Instead of Yahweh ruling personally over all of the nations, he seems to have delegated the responsibility to other divine beings.

In his book *Paul and the Torah*, L. Gaston addresses this issue. Over the years, many scholars have approached Paul's writings from a Jewish perspective. That is, they have tried to read his correspondences with a Jewish audience in mind. While Paul himself was Jewish, his audience was not. In preaching to such a non-Jewish audience, "one would expect Paul to be dealing with Gentile problems, using concepts intelligible to Gentiles."⁷⁸ Gaston demonstrates that one of Paul's major concerns was how the Torah related to the Gentiles. He argues that Paul saw the Torah as God-given and necessary for the Jews. What, then, of the Gentiles? He explains that God used two different modes of divine sovereignty: "voluntary, direct, and personal over Israel, and unacknowledged, indirect, and impersonal over the nations."⁷⁹ God's "indirect" mode of sovereignty, according to Gaston, was through the medium of divine beings.

What were these divine beings that held sway over the Gentiles? Gaston writes, "There is a tradition which identifies Gentile deities with the angels of God, the seventy angels of the nations, and there is at least the strong possibility that their function was to administer the law of

⁷⁸ Lloyd Gaston, *Paul and the Torah* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987), p. 37.

⁷⁹ Gaston, *Paul and the Torah*, p. 38.

God in realms beyond the covenant with Israel.”⁸⁰ If this view is correct, then the following examples may help to illuminate the Philippian hymn.

The deities described in the texts of these “Gentile” nations were situated at different levels of the cosmos. For example, to the east of Jerusalem, one may read in Mesopotamian religious literature, “the gods of heaven went up to heaven, the gods of the nether world went into the nether world.”⁸¹ To the south, Egyptian literature was replete with references to deities situated in different spheres of the cosmos: “O all you gods who are in sky and earth, in the waters and in the horizon, prepare a path for my soul.”⁸² And to the north, the Syrian gods “Baal, Yam, and Mot ruled as kings over particular realms within the universe (storms, the sea, and the Netherworld)...much as in Greek mythology Zeus, Poseidon, and Pluto ruled simultaneously.”⁸³ Thus, the idea of divine beings inhabiting all three levels of the cosmos was not foreign in the ancient world, especially to “Gentiles.”

Returning to Paul’s view, Gaston argues that these supernatural powers were not viewed as evil forces. Rather, they “seem to have exercised a certain positive function in the administration of order in creation, but in a world come of age their rule [had] come to be confining and oppressive.”⁸⁴ While these divine beings appear in the writings of Paul, the author does not elaborate on their natures. One thing, however, is made clear: “they have administered a law from which Gentiles have been redeemed in Christ.”⁸⁵ This latter evidence supports the argument that the phrase “in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth” refers to divine beings that were responsible for governing the nations and from whom Jesus was a liberator.

⁸⁰ Gaston, *Paul and the Torah*, p. 42.

⁸¹ *CAD E 310*, s.v. *eršetu*.

⁸² Spell 497 in R.O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts*. Vol. II (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips, Ltd., 1973), p.136.

⁸³ Lowell K. Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven: The Syro-Palestinian Pantheon as Bureaucracy* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1994), pp. 112-113.

⁸⁴ Gaston, *Paul and the Torah*, p. 42.

⁸⁵ Gaston, *Paul and the Torah*, p. 33.

From the perspective of the Hebrew Bible, it appears as though that “in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth” refers to God’s dominion over a three-tiered cosmos, but with an emphasis on human activity (living and dead). From this point of view, God’s dominion over the three-tiered cosmos had been given to Jesus. From the perspective of the Septuagint, Dead Sea Scrolls, and other extra-biblical traditions, on the other hand, this phrase would appear to refer exclusively to the divine powers of the cosmos’ three realms. Jesus, then, was given dominion over the divine powers who had ruled throughout the cosmos. Which view was the author of the hymn in Philippians alluding to?

The Multivalent Figure of Adam

These differing views do not necessarily conflict if this hymn employs the multivalent image of Adam. In Paul’s writings, the thoroughly Jewish figure of Adam is used on a number of occasions. Paul believed that this pre-Mosaic prototypical man was “an appropriate figure to use when thinking about the relationship between God and the Gentile world.”⁸⁶ However, while “it is agreed by virtually all [scholars]... that the ‘hymn’ employs an Adam-Christ parallel,”⁸⁷ few have extended the implications of the parallel to the phrase “in heaven and on earth and under the earth.”

For instance, Dunn stated, “Adam seems to be a figure who lay behind a great deal of Paul’s theologizing. And the bulk of Paul’s Adam theologizing seems to be allusive rather than explicit. It should occasion no surprise, therefore, if Paul understood or constructed the Philippian hymn to embody a similar allusion.”⁸⁸ However, as he lays out the text of the hymn and points out all of the allusions to Adam, he leaves the area next to verses ten and eleven

⁸⁶ Gaston, *Paul and the Torah*, p. 24.

⁸⁷ Hurst, “Christ, Adam, and Preexistence Revisited,” p. 84.

⁸⁸ Dunn, “Christ, Adam, and Preexistence,” p. 75.

blank.⁸⁹ To his credit, in addressing these verses later, Dunn does mention “Jewish reflection on Adam was already embracing the thought of Adam’s ascension to heaven and glorification.”⁹⁰

But he nowhere ties this theme to those beings “in heaven and on earth and under the earth.”

As mentioned above, the theme of enthronement has been recognized by many scholars within this hymn, but rarely do they reference Adam in conjunction with this enthronement.⁹¹ In apocryphal and pseudepigraphic literature, sometimes Adam is referred to as a king, but the meaning of this title is rarely elaborated upon.⁹² There are, however, descriptive accounts of angels paying homage to Adam. In the *Life of Adam and Eve*, Adam is told that following his creation, “Michael went out and called all the angels, saying, ‘Worship the image of the Lord God, as the Lord God has instructed.’”⁹³

There are also Rabbinic traditions “which describe the angels’ ministry and/or praise of Adam.”⁹⁴ This literature records that “God made Adam to be king over the world, but the serpent wished to kill Adam so he could become king instead.”⁹⁵ As a result of this treacherous

⁸⁹ Dunn, “Christ, Adam, and Preexistence,” p. 76.

⁹⁰ Dunn, “Christ, Adam, and Preexistence,” p. 77.

⁹¹ When Adam is mentioned in regards to the enthronement motif, it is only to contrast the fallen Adam with the exalted Jesus.

⁹² Scroggs, *The Last Adam*, p. 25; See fn. 25 for references.

⁹³ *Life of Adam and Eve* 14.1. All translations of pseudepigraphic literature are from James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. Vols. I- II (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1983).

⁹⁴ Scroggs, *The Last Adam*, p. 48. For example, *Genesis Rabbah* VIII, 10 states, “When the Holy One... created Adam, the ministering angels mistook him [for a divine being] and wished to exclaim ‘Holy’ before Him.” Harry Freedman, *Midrash Rabbah I* (London: Soncino Press, 1951), p.61

Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer records “[Adam] stood on his feet and was adorned with the Divine Image... All the creatures saw him and became afraid of him, thinking that he was their Creator, and they came to prostrate themselves before him.” Gerald Friedlander, *Pirke De Rabbi Eliezer (The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great) According to the Text of the Manuscript Belonging to Abraham Epstein of Vienna* (New York: B. Blom, 1971), p. 79. Commenting on this passage, Friedlander writes, “The word ‘creatures’ of our text reads ‘ministering angels’ in the Midrashim” (p. 79, fn. 5).

⁹⁵ Scroggs, *The Last Adam*, p. 46. *Aboth de Rabbi Nathan* reads, “What was the wicked serpent contemplating at that time? He thought: I shall go and kill Adam and wed his wife, and I shall be king over the whole world.” Judah Goldin, *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), p. 10.

plot, Adam fell. In doing so, he not only brought death upon himself, but also upon his progeny. Thus, humankind was subjugated to opposing powers.⁹⁶

Adam was not, however, to remain in a state of helplessness and servitude. Later in the narrative of the *Life of Adam and Eve*, following Adam's death, the angel Michael petitions the Lord: "Let him be in your custody until the day of dispensing punishment at the last years, when I will turn his sorrow into joy. Then he shall sit on the throne of him who overthrew him."⁹⁷ This imagery of Adam enthroned is elaborated in another version of this passage. Here, the Lord God says to Adam, "I will establish you in your dominion on the throne of your seducer... Then he himself and those who listen to him shall be condemned, and they shall greatly mourn and weep when they see you sitting on his glorious throne."⁹⁸

In the *Testament of Abraham* (possibly written during the first century C.E.) there is a vivid depiction of an exalted and enthroned Adam. In this text, the angel Michael shows Abraham humankind being judged. Upon entering the first gate of heaven, "they saw a man seated on a golden throne... Then Abraham asked [Michael], '...Who is this wondrous man, who is adorned in such glory?'" Michael responds, "This is the first-formed Adam."⁹⁹

A concluding aspect of the enthroned Adam motif may incorporate yet another theme that some scholars have noted earlier in the hymn: Wisdom. In the *Wisdom of Jesus ben Sira*, the imagery of Wisdom is associated with the Garden of Eden:¹⁰⁰ "He [the most high God] filleth all things with *wisdom*, as Phison and as Tigris in the time of the new fruits... to abound like Euphrates and as Jordan in the time of the harvest... as Geon in the time of vintage" (Sir. 24:25-

⁹⁶ Gaston notes that "in terms of the bondage of the Gentiles to the law [administered by the heavenly powers], creation or Adam" was the beginning of such a relationship of servitude. Gaston, *Paul and the Torah*, p. 43.

⁹⁷ *Life of Adam and Eve* 47.3.

⁹⁸ *Apocalypse of Adam* 39.2-3.

⁹⁹ *Testament of Abraham* 11.4,8-9.

¹⁰⁰ See also Margaret Barker, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), pp. 65-66.

27, emphasis added).¹⁰¹ These rivers, Phison, Tigris, Euphrates, and Geon, are described as emanating from the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:10-14). As the domain of Adam, the Garden of Eden was a place where “wisdom” also held sway. In the *Wisdom of Solomon*, the association between Wisdom and the kingly Adam is even stronger:

O God...who hast...ordained man through thy wisdom, that he should have dominion over the creatures which thou hast made, and order the world according to equity and righteousness...

She [Wisdom] preserved the first formed father of the world...and bought him out of his fall, and gave him power to rule all things.

(Wis. 9:1-3; 10:1-2)

According to these passages, it was Wisdom who gave Adam his dominion and capacitated him to rule over *all* creation.

Regarding the participation of early Christians in hymns, Scroggs noted that “the *meaning* for the acclaimers...must lie in the enthronement itself, the restoration of the cosmos to its rightful *kyrios*.”¹⁰² The message of salvation, Scroggs argues, is that in Jesus’ enthronement, the oppressive divine powers were dethroned and lost their hold over humankind.¹⁰³ Given the previous discussion of Second Temple period literature, this same imagery was also applied to Adam.

Conclusion

As the previous discussion demonstrates, the phrase “in heaven and on earth and under the earth” can be viewed from many different perspectives, all from within the framework of a tripartite cosmos. These differing perspectives, however, share a common thread. When viewed in light of different Second Temple conceptions of Adam, these different perspectives can be

¹⁰¹ Septuagint translations are taken from Lancelot C. L. Brenton, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1986).

¹⁰² Scroggs, “Paul: Myth Remaker,” p. 91.

¹⁰³ Scroggs, “Paul: Myth Remaker,” p. 91.

present at the same time. Because the image of Adam was so multivalent, Paul may have employed an allusion to Adam to create a form of ambiguity. In this way, each of the different perspectives (anthropocentrism, multiple heavenly powers, and wisdom) could be conceptually present at the same time, allowing even those who held such differing perspectives to understand Christ's supremacy. This would follow Paul's policy of becoming "all things to all people so that I might by any means save some" (1 Cor. 9:22). Thus, through an allusion to Adam, this passage became "many things to many people" so that they might all understand Christ's sovereignty over the cosmos.

For example, if a community member understood the phrase "in heaven and on earth and under the earth" from the anthropocentric perspective of the Hebrew Bible, the phrase could be interpreted as referring to Adam's previous association with heavenly beings, those who share in his mortal experience, and the blessed dead who had met his same fate. For another community member who had the perspective of the non-traditional Hebrew texts found at Qumran, the Diaspora-oriented Septuagint, or other Hellenistic traditions, the same phrase could refer to the multitude of heavenly powers that inhabited the different levels of the cosmos who once worshipped Adam in the Garden of Eden. If yet another community member viewed the phrase from the perspective of the Wisdom tradition, the enthroned Adam could be seen as Wisdom's representative who was given charge over all creation. Thus, each of the disparate paradigms that scholars have proposed for viewing this hymn can all be found in the varieties of Second Temple conceptualizations of Adam.

These views, though varied, are not mutually exclusive if one keeps in mind the nature of allusions. While the aforementioned reconciliatory paradigm of Adamic imagery was only applied to one phrase of the hymn, this synthesis has demonstrated that multivalenced allusions

are possible. If such a multivalenced allusion is possible within this relatively small section, then couldn't the same hold true for the rest of the hymn? If this is the case, then scholars should be less exclusive in their interpretations of the hymn. Dunn made this astute observation:

Much of the debate has failed to reckon with the subtle way in which allusion works. To make the recognition of allusions and their significance depend on precision of meaning in individual terms would run counter to the art of allusion. On the contrary, it is often the imprecision of the meaning of a term, or multifaceted imagery of a metaphor, that enables the interconnection or imaginative jump that is the stuff of allusion.¹⁰⁴

The many differing scholarly interpretations of this *Carmen Christi* demonstrate that this is a very complex composition. While the majority of scholars argue for a particular interpretation of the hymn as a whole, a more nuanced approach should be taken. Instead of ruling out seemingly opposing interpretations, scholars would benefit from trying to understand how possibly conflicting ideas may have been present simultaneously, as well as how an author may have used such multivalent imagery to accomplish his or her purposes.

¹⁰⁴ Dunn, "Christ, Adam, and Preexistence," p. 75.

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